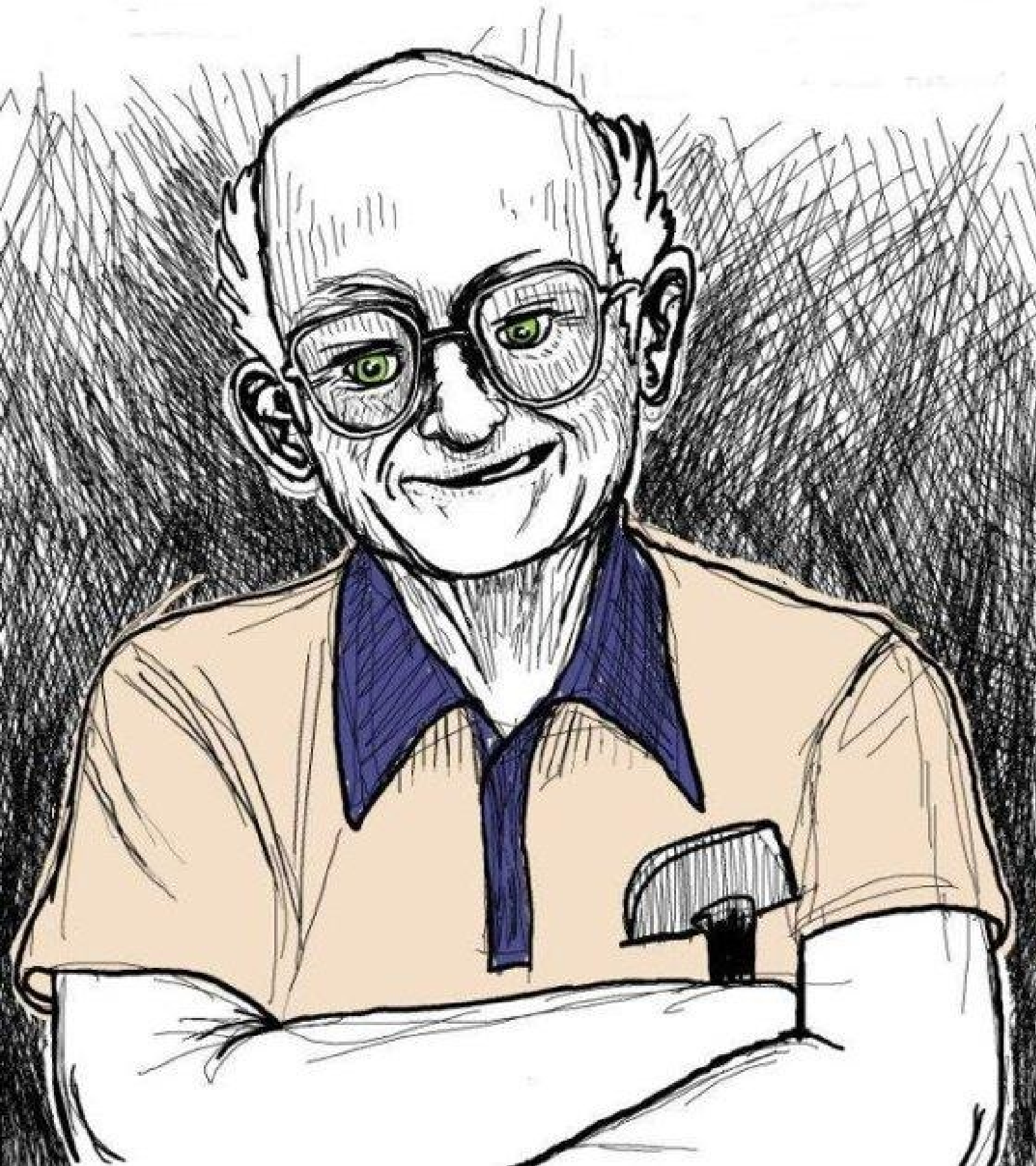


# 97 stories by R.A. Lafferty



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## THE SIX FINGERS OF TIME

He began by breaking things that morning. He broke the glass of water on his night stand. He knocked it crazily against the opposite wall and shattered it. Yet it shattered slowly. This would have surprised him if he had been fully awake, for he had only reached out weakly for it.

Nor had he wakened regularly to his alarm; he had wakened to a weird, slow, low booming, yet the clock said six, time for the alarm. And the low boom, when it came again, seemed to come from the clock. He reached out and touched it gently, but it floated off the stand at his touch and bounced around slowly on the floor. And when he picked it up again it had stopped, nor would shaking start it.

He checked the electric clock in the kitchen. This also said six o'clock, but the sweep hand did not move. In his living room the radio clock said six, but the second hand seemed stationary. "But the lights in both rooms work," said Vincent "How are the clocks both stopped? Are the receptacles on a separate circuit?" He went back to his bedroom and got his wristwatch. It also said six; and its sweep hand did not sweep. "Now this could get silly. What is it that would stop both mechanical and electrical clocks?"

He went to the window and looked out at the advertising clock on the Mutual Insurance Building. It said six o'clock, and the second hand did not move.

"Well, it is possible that the confusion is not limited to myself. I heard once the fanciful theory that a cold shower will clear the mind. For me it never has, but I will try it. I can always use cleanliness for an excuse."

The shower didn't work. Yes, it did: the water came now, but not like water; like very slow syrup that hung in the air. He reached up to touch it hanging down there and stretching. And it shattered like glass when he touched it, and drifted in fantastic slow globs across the room. But it had the feel of water. It was wet and pleasantly cool. And in a quarter of a minute or so it was down over his shoulders and back, and he luxuriated in it. He let it soak on his noggin, and it cleared his wits at once.

"There is not a thing wrong with me. I am fine. It is not my fault that the water is slow this morning and other things are awry."

He reached for the towel and it tore to pieces in his hands like porous wet paper.

He now became very careful in the way he handled things. Slowly, tenderly and deftly he took them so that they would not break. He shaved himself without mishap in spite of the slow water in the lavatory also.

Then he dressed himself with the greatest caution and cunning, breaking nothing except his shoe laces, and that is likely to happen at any time.

“If there is nothing the matter with me, then I will check and see if there is anything seriously wrong with the world. The dawn was fairly along when I looked out, as it should have been. Approximately twenty minutes have passed; it is a clear morning; the sun should now have hit the top several stories of the Insurance Building.”

But it had not. It was still a clear morning, but the dawn had not brightened at all in the twenty minutes. And that big clock still said six. It had not changed.

Yet it had changed, and he knew it with a queer feeling. He pictured it as it had been before. But the sweep second hand had moved. It had swept a third of the dial.

So he pulled up a chair at the window and watched it. He realized that, though he could not see it move, yet it did make progress. He watched it for perhaps five minutes. It moved through a space of perhaps five seconds.

“Well, that is not my problem. It is that of the clock maker, either a terrestrial or a celestial one.”

But he left his rooms without a good breakfast, and he left them very early. How did he know that it was early since there was something wrong with the time? Well, it was early at least according to the sun and according to the clocks, neither of which institutions seemed to be working properly.

He left without a good breakfast because the coffee would not make and the bacon would not fry. And in plain point of fact the fire would not heat. The gas flame sprung up from the pilot like a slowly spreading stream or an unfolding flower. Then it burned far too steadily. The skillet remained cold when placed over it; nor would water even heat. It had taken at least five minutes to get the water out of the faucet in the first place.

He ate a few pieces of leftover bread and some scraps of meat.

In the street there was no motion, no real motion. A truck, first

seeming at rest, moved very slowly. There was no gear in which it could move so slowly. And there was a taxi which crept along, but Charles Vincent had to look at it carefully for some time to be sure that it was in motion. Then he received a shock. He realized by the early morning light that the driver of it was dead. Dead with his eyes wide open!

Slow as it was going, and by whatever means it was moving, it should really be stopped. Vincent walked over to it, opened the door, and pulled on the brake, Then he looked into the eyes of that dead man. Was he really dead? It was hard to be sure. He felt warm. But, even as Vincent looked, the eyes of the dead man had begun to close. And close they did and open again in a matter of about twenty seconds.

This was weird. The slowly closing and opening eyes sent a chill through Vincent. And the dead man had begun to lean forward in his seat. Vincent put a hand in the middle of the man's chest to hold him upright, but he found the forward pressure to be as relentless as it was slow. He was unable to keep the dead man up.

So he let him go, watching curiously; and in a few seconds the driver's face was against the wheel. But it was almost as if it had no intention of stopping there. It pressed into the wheel with dogged force. The man would surely break his face. Vincent took several holds on the dead man and counteracted the pressure somewhat. Yet the face was being damaged, and if things were normal blood would have flowed.

The man had been dead so long however, that though he was still warm his blood must have congealed, for it was fully two minutes before it began to ooze.

"Whatever I have done, I have done enough damage," said Vincent. "And, in whatever nightmare I am in, I am likely to do further harm if I meddle more. I had better leave it alone."

He walked on down the street. Yet whatever vehicles he saw now were moving with an incredible slowness as though driven by some fantastic gear reduction. And there were people here and there frozen solid. It was a chilly morning, but it was not that cold. They were immobile in positions of motion, as though they were playing the children's game of Statues.

"How is it," said Charles Vincent, "that this young girl, who I believe works across the street from us, should have died standing up and in full stride? But, no. She is not dead. Or if so she died with a very alert

expression. And, oh my God, she's doing it too!"

For he realized that the eyes of the girl were closing, and in a space of a few seconds they had completed their cycle and were open again. Also, and this was even stranger, she had moved, moved forward in full stride. He would have timed her if he could. How could he time her when all the clocks in the world were crazy? Yet she must have been taking about two steps a minute.

Vincent went into the cafeteria. The early morning crowd that he had often watched through the window was there. The girl who made flapjacks in the window had just flipped one and it hung in the air. Then it floated over as though caught by a slight breeze, and sank slowly down as if settling in water.

The early morning breakfasters, like the people in the street, were all dead in this new way, moving with almost imperceptible motion. And all had apparently died in the act of drinking coffee, eating eggs, or munching toast. And if there was only time enough, there was an even chance that they would get the drinking, eating, and munching done with, for there was a shadow of movement in them all.

The cashier had the register drawer open and money in her hand, and the hand of the customer was out-stretched for it. In time, somewhere in the new leisurely time, the hands would come together and the change be given. And so it happened. It may have been a minute and a half, or two minutes, or two and a half. It is always hard to judge time, and now it had become all but impossible.

"I am still hungry," said Charles Vincent, "but it would be foolhardy to wait on the service here. Should I help myself? They would not mind if they are dead. And, if they are not dead, in any case it seems that I am invisible to them."

He wolfed several rolls. He opened a bottle of milk and held it upside-down over his glass while he ate another roll. Liquids had all become so perversely slow.

But he felt better for his erratic breakfast. He would have paid for it, but how?

He left the cafeteria and walked about the town as it seemed still to be quite early, though one could depend on neither sun nor clock for the time any more. The traffic lights were unchanging. He sat for a long time in a little park and watched the town and the big clock in the Commerce

Building tower; but like all the clocks it was either stopped or the hand would creep too slowly to be seen.

It must have been just about an hour till the traffic lights changed, but change they did at last. By picking a point on the building across the street and watching what moved by it, he found that the traffic did indeed move. In a minute or so, the entire length of a car would pass a given point.

He had, he recalled, been very far behind in his work, and it had been worrying him. He decided to go to the office, early as it was or seemed to be.

He let himself in. Nobody else was there. He resolved not to look at the clock and to be very careful of the way he handled all objects because of his new propensity for breaking things. This considered, all seemed normal here. He had said the day before that he could hardly catch up on his work if he worked for two days solid. He now resolved at least to work steadily until something happened, whatever it was.

For hour after hour he worked on his tabulations and reports. Nobody else had arrived. Could something be wrong? Certainly something was wrong. But today was not a holiday. That was not it.

Just how long can a stubborn and mystified man work away at his task? It was hour after hour after hour. He did not become hungry nor particularly tired. And he did get through a lot of work.

“It must be half done. However it has happened, I have caught up at least a day’s work; I will keep on.”

He must have worked silently for another eight or ten hours.

He was caught up completely on his back work.

“Well, to some extent I can work into the future. I can head-up and carry over. I can put in everything but the figures of the field reports.”

And he did so.

“It will be hard to bury me in work again. I could almost coast for a day. I don’t even know what day it is, but I must have worked twenty hours straight through and nobody has arrived. Perhaps nobody ever will arrive. If they are moving with the speed of the people in the nightmare outside, it is no wonder they have not arrived.”

He put his head down in his arms on the desk. The last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was the misshapen left thumb that had always been his and which he had always tried to conceal a little by the way

handled he his hands.

“At least I know that I am still myself. I’d know myself anywhere by that.”

Then he went to sleep at his desk.

Jenny came in with a quick click-click-click of high heels, and he wakened to the noise.

“What are you doing dozing at your desk, Mr. Vincent? Have you been here all night?”

“I don’t know, Jenny. Honestly I don’t.”

“I was only teasing. Sometimes when I get here a little early I take a catnap myself.”

The clock said six minutes till eight, and the second hand was sweeping normally. Time had returned to the world. Or to him. But had all that early morning of his been a dream? Then it had been a very efficient dream. He had accomplished work he could hardly have done in two days. And it was the same day that it was supposed to be.

He went to the water fountain. The water now behaved normally. He went to the window. The traffic was behaving as it should. Though sometimes slow and sometimes snarled, yet it was in the pace of the regular world.

The other workers arrived. They were not balls of fire, but neither was it necessary to observe them for several minutes to be sure that they weren’t dead.

“It did have its advantages,” Charles Vincent said. “I would be afraid to have it permanently, but it would be handy to go into the state for a few minutes a day and accomplish the business of hours. I may be a case for the doctor. But just how would I go about telling a doctor what was bothering me?”

Now it had surely been less than too hours from his first rising till the time that he wakened from his second sleep to the noise of Jenny. And how long that second sleep had been, or in which time enclave, he had no idea. But how account for it all? He had spent a long time in his own rooms, much longer than ordinary in his confusion. He had walked the city mile after mile in his puzzlement. And he had sat in the little park for hours and studied the situation. And he had sat and worked at his own desk for an outlandish long time.



Well, he would go to the doctor. A man is obliged to refrain from making a fool of himself to the world at large, but to his lawyer, his priest, or his doctor he will sometimes have to come as a fool. By their callings they are restrained from scoffing openly.

He went to the doctor at noon.

Dr. Mason was not particularly a friend. Charles Vincent realized with some unease that he did not have any particular friends, only acquaintances and associates. It was as though he were of a species slightly apart from his fellows. He wished a little now that he had a particular friend.

But Dr. Mason was an acquaintance of some years, had the reputation of being a good doctor, and besides, Vincent had now arrived at his office and been shown in. He would either have to — well, that was as good a beginning as any.

“Doctor, I am in a predicament. I will either have to invent some symptoms to account for my visit here, or to make an excuse and bolt, or tell you what is bothering me, even though you will think that I am a new sort of idiot.”

“Vincent, every day people invent symptoms to cover their visits here, and I know that they have lost their nerve about their real reason for coming. And every day people do make excuses and bolt. But experience tells me that I will get a larger fee if you tackle the third alternative. And, Vincent, there is no new sort of idiot.”

“It may not sound so silly if I tell it quickly,” Vincent said. “I awoke this morning to some very puzzling incidents. It seemed that time itself had stopped, or that the whole world had gone into super-slow motion. The water would neither flow nor boil, and the fire would not heat food. The clocks, which I at first believed had stopped, crept along at perhaps a minute an hour. The people I met in the streets appeared dead, frozen in life-like attitudes. It was only by watching them for a very long time that I perceived that they did indeed have motion. One taxi I saw creeping slower than the most backward snail, and a dead man at the wheel of it. I went to it, opened the door, and put on the brake. I realized after a time that the man was not dead. But he bent forward and broke his face on the steering wheel. It must have taken a full minute for his head to travel no more than ten inches, yet I was unable to prevent him from hitting the wheel. I then did other bizarre things in a world that had died on its feet.

I walked many miles through the city, and then I sat for countless hours in the park. I went to the office and let myself in. I accomplished work that must have taken me twenty hours. I then took a nap at my desk. When I awoke on the arrival of others it was six minutes till eight in the morning of the same day, today. Not two hours had passed from my rising, and time was back to normal. But there were things that happened in that time that could never be compressed into two hours.”

“One question first, Vincent. Did you actually accomplish the work, the work of many hours?”

“I did. It was done and done in that time. It did not become undone on the return of time to normal.”

“A second question: had you been worried about your work, about being behind in your work?”

“Yes. Emphatically.”

“Then here is one explanation. You retired last night. But very shortly afterward you arose in a state of somnambulism. There are facets of sleep-walking which we do not at all understand. The time-out-of-focus interludes were parts of a walking dream of yours. You dressed and went to your office and worked all night. It is possible to do routine tasks while in a somnambulistic state. rapidly and even feverishly, to perform prodigies. You may have fallen into a normal sleep there when you had finished, or you may have been awakened directly from your somnambulistic trance on the arrival of your co-workers. There. That is a plausible and workable explanation. In the case of an apparently bizarre happening it is always well to have a rational explanation to fall back on. This will usually satisfy a patient and put his mind to rest. But often the explanation does not satisfy me.”

“Your explanation very nearly satisfies me, Dr. Mason, and it does put my mind considerably at rest. I am sure that in a short while I will be able to accept it completely. But why does it not satisfy you?”

“One reason is a man, a taxi-driver, whom I treated very early this morning. He had his face smashed, and he had seen — or almost seen — a ghost: a ghost of incredible swiftness that was more sensed than seen. The ghost opened the door of his car while it was going a full speed, jerked on the brake, and caused him to crack his head. This man was dazed and had a slight concussion. I have convinced him that he did not see an ghost at all, that he must have dozed at the wheel and run into

something. As I say, I am harder to convince than my patients. But it may have been coincidence.

“I hope so. But you also seem to have another reservation as to my case.

“After quite a few years in practice, I seldom see or hear anything new. Twice before I have been told a happening or a dream on the line of what you experienced.”

“Did you convince your other patients that they were only dreams?”

“I did. Both of them. That is, I convinced them the first few times it happened to them.”

“Were they satisfied?”

“At first they were. Later not entirely. But they both died within a year of their coming to me.

“Of nothing violent, I hope.”

“Both had the most gentle deaths. That of senility extreme.”

“Oh. Well I’m too young for that.”

“Vincent, I would like you to come back in a month or so.”

“I will, if the delusion or the dream returns. Or if I do not feel well.”

After this Charles Vincent began to forget about the incident. He only recalled it with humor sometimes when again he was behind in his work.

“Well, if it gets bad enough I may do another sleepwalking jag and catch up. But if there is another aspect of time and I could enter it at will, it might often be handy.”

Charles Vincent never saw the man’s face at all. It is very dark in some of those clubs and the Coq Bleu is like the inside of a tomb. Vincent went to the clubs only about once a month, sometimes after a show when he did not want to go home to bed, sometimes when he was just plain restless.

Citizens of the more fortunate states may not know of the mysteries of the clubs. In Vincent’s the only bars are beer bars, and only in the clubs can a person get a drink, and only members are admitted. It is true that a small club as the Coq Bleu had thirty thousand members, and at a dollar a year this is a nice sideline. The little numbered membership cards cost a penny each for the printing, and the member wrote in his own name. But he was supposed to have a card or a dollar for a card to gain admittance.

But there could be no entertainment in the clubs. There was nothing there but the little bar room in the near darkness. The near darkness of

the clubs was custom only but it had the force of the law.

The man was there, and then he was not, and then he was there again. And always where he sat it was too dark to see his face.

“I wonder,” he said to Vincent (or to the bar at large, though there were no other customers and the bartender was asleep). “I wonder if you have read Zubarin on the relationship of extradigitalism to genius?”

“I have never heard of the work nor of the man,” said Vincent. “Doubt if either exist.”

“I am Zubarin.” said the man.

Vincent instinctively hid his misshapen left thumb. Yet it could not have been noticed in that light, and he must have been crazy to believe that there was any connection between it and the man’s remark. It was not truly a double thumb. He was not an extradigital, nor was he a genius.

“I refuse to become interested in you,” said Vincent. “I am on the verge of leaving. I dislike waking the bartender, but I did want another drink.”

“Sooner done than said.”

“What is?”

“Your glass is full.”

“It is? So it is. Is it a trick?”

“Trick is a name for anything either too frivolous or too mystifying for us to comprehend. But on one long early morning a month ago you also could have done the trick, and nearly as well.”

“Could I have? How do you know about my long early morning — assuming there to have been such?”

“I watched you for a while. Few others have the equipment with which to watch you when you’re in the aspect.”

So they were silent for some time, and Vincent watched the clock and was ready to go.

“I wonder,” said the man in the dark, “if you have read Schimmelpenninck on the sexagintal and the duodecimal in the Chaldee Mysteries.”

“I have not, and I doubt if anyone else has. I would guess that you are also Schimmelpenninck, and that you have just made up the name on the spur of the moment.”

“I am Schimm, it is true, but I made up the name on the spur of the moment many years ago.”

“I am a little bored with you,” said Vincent, “but I would appreciate it if you’d do your glass-filling trick once more.”

“I have just done so again. And you are not bored; you are frightened.”

“Of what?” asked Vincent, whose glass had in fact filled again.

“Of reentering a dream that you are not sure was a dream. But there are often advantages to being both invisible and inaudible.”

“Can you be invisible?”

“Was I not so when I went behind the bar just now and fixed you a drink?”

“How?”

“A man in full stride goes at the rate of about five miles an hour. Multiply that by sixty, which is the number of time. When I leave my stool and go behind the bar I go at the rate of three hundred miles an hour. So I am invisible to you, particularly if I move while you blink.”

“One thing does not match. You might have got around there and back. But you could not have poured.”

“Shall I say that mastery over liquids and other objects is not given to beginners? But for us there are many ways to outwit the slowness of matter.”

“I believe that you are a hoaxer. Do you know Dr. Mason?”

“I know of him, and that you went to see him. I know of his futile attempts to penetrate a certain mystery. But I have not talked to him of you.”

“I still believe that you are a phony. Could you put me back into the state of my dream of a month ago?”

“It was not a dream. But I could put you again into that state.”

“Prove it.”

“Watch the clock. Do you believe that I can point my finger at it and stop it for you? It is already stopped for me.”

“No, I don’t believe it. Yes, I guess I have to, since I see that you have just done it. But it may be another trick. I don’t know where the clock is plugged in.”

“Neither do I. Come to the door. Look at every clock you can see. Are they not all stopped?”

“Yes. Maybe the power has gone off all over town.”

“You know it has not. There are still a few lighted windows in those buildings, though it is quite late.”

“Why are you playing with me? I am neither on the inside nor the outside. Either tell me the secret or say that you will not tell me.”

“The secret isn’t a simple one. It can only be arrived at after all philosophy and learning has been assimilated.”

“One man cannot arrive at that in one lifetime.”

“Not in an ordinary lifetime. But the secret of the secret, if I may put it that way, is that one must use part of it as a tool in learning. You could not learn all in one lifetime but, by being permitted the first step, to be able to read, say, sixty books in the time it took you to read one, to pause for a minute in thought and use up only one second, to get the day’s work accomplished in eight minutes and so have time for other things — by such ways one may make a beginning. I will warn you, though. Even for the most intelligent it is a race.”

“A race? What race?”

“It is a race between success, which is life, and failure, which is death.”

“Let us skip the melodrama. But how do I get into the state and out of it?”

“Oh, that is simple, so easy that it seems like a gadget. Here are two diagrams I will draw. Note them carefully. This first — invision it in your mind, and you are in the state. Now the second one — invision, and you are out of it.”

“That easy?”

“That deceptively easy. The trick is to learn why it works — if you want to succeed, meaning to live.”

So Charles Vincent left him and went home, walking the mile in a little less than fifteen seconds. But he still had not seen the face of the man.

There are advantages intellectual, monetary, and amorous in being able to enter the accelerated state at will. It is a fox game. One must be careful not to be caught at it, nor to break or harm that which is in the normal state.

Vincent could always find eight or ten minutes unobserved to accomplish the day’s work. And a fifteen-minute coffee break could turn into a fifteen hour romp around the town.

There was this boyish pleasure in becoming a ghost: to appear and stand motionless in front of an onrushing train and to cause the scream of the whistle, and to be in no danger, being able to move five or ten times as fast as the train; to enter and to sit suddenly in the middle of a select

group and see them stare, and then virtually to disappear from the middle of them; to interfere in sports and games, entering the prize ring and tripping, hampering, or slugging the unliked fighter; to blue-shot down the hockey ice, skating at fifteen hundred miles an hour and scoring dozens of goals at either end while the people only know that something odd is happening.

There is pleasure in being able to shatter windows by chanting little songs, for the voice (when in the state) will be to the world at sixty times its regular pitch, though normal to oneself. And for this reason also he was inaudible to others.

There was fun in petty thieving and tricks. He could take a wallet from a man's pocket and be two blocks away when the victim turned at the heel. He could come back and stuff it into the man's mouth as he bleated to a policeman.

He could come into the home of a lady writing a letter, snatch up the paper and write three lines on it and vanish before the scream got out of her throat.

He could take shoe and sock off a man's foot while he was in full stride. No human face since the beginning of time ever showed such a look of pure astonishment as that of the man to whom this first happened. Discovering oneself half barefoot of a sudden in a crowded street has no parallel in all experience.

Vincent could paint the eyeglasses of a man dark green, and this would somehow alter the man's whole personality. He'd gulp and wave his arms and develop new mannerisms. Or as a victim took the first puff of a cigarette Vincent would take it from his mouth, smoke it quickly down to the hot nub, and replace it.

He would take food off forks on the way to mouths, put baby turtles and live fish into bowls of soup between spoonfuls of the eater. And, as a cook cracked an egg over the griddle, he would scoop up the soft contents in mid-air and set down a full-grown quacking duck to the discomfort of both cook and bird.

He would lash the hands of hand-shakers tightly together with stout cord, and tie together the shoe laces of dancing partners. Or he would remove the strings of guitars while they were being played, or steal the mouthpiece of a horn while the operator paused for breath. He unzipped persons of both sexes when they were at their most pompous,

and it was on his account (probably) that Feldman was not elected mayor. This was something that happened on the public platform, and Feldman was completely undone.

This thing can remain a pleasant novelty for some time. There was, of course, the difficulty of moving large objects. Vincent always wanted to intrude a horse into the midst of a certain assembly. But a horse is too large to be moved in an accelerated time. Vincent drew out the diagram that the faceless man had given him, and presented it to the only horse he knew. But the horse did not get the idea. It would not go into the accelerated state.

“I will either have to find a smarter horse or a new method of moving heavy objects,” said Charles Vincent.

Vincent would sometimes handcuff two strangers together as they stood waiting for a traffic light to change. He would lash leaners to lamp posts, and steal the teeth from the mouths of those afflicted with dentures.

He would write cryptic and frightening messages in grease pencil on a plate just as a diner began to fill it. He changed cards from one player's hands to another's while play was in progress, and he interfered perversely with billiard balls.

He removed golf balls from tees during the back swing, and left notes written large “YOU MISSED ME” pinned to the ground with the tee.

He stole baseballs from catchers' mitts at the instant of impact, and left instead small unfledged live sparrows. It was found that there is nothing in the rule book to cover this.

Or he shaved moustaches and heads. Returning repeatedly to one woman he disliked, he clipped her bald and gilded her pate.

With tellers counting their money he interfered outrageously and enriched himself. He snipped cigarettes in two with a scissors and blew out matches and lighters, so that one frustrated man actually broke down and cried at his inability to get a light.

He removed the weapons from the holsters of policemen and put cap pistols and water guns in their places. And he liked to rip off one sleeve only from the coat of a walking gentleman. There is something funnier about one sleeve missing than two.

He unclipped the leashes of dogs and substituted little toy dogs rolling on wheels. He put frogs in water glasses and left lighted firecrackers on



bridge tables. He reset wristwatches on wrists; and played cruel tricks in mens' rooms, causing honest gentleman to wet themselves.

"I was always a boy at heart," said Charles Vincent.

Also during those first few days of the controlled new state, he established himself materially, acquiring wealth by devious ways, and opening bank accounts in various cities under various names, against a time of possible need.

Nor did he ever feel any shame for the tricks that he played on unaccelerated humanity. For the people, when he was in the state, were as statues to him, hardly living, barely moving, unseeing, unhearing. And it is no shame to show disrespect to such comical statues.

And also, and again because he was a boy at heart, he had fun with the girls.

"I am one mass of black and blue marks," said Jenny one day. "My lips are sore and my front teeth are loosened. I don't know what in the world is the matter with me."

Yet he had not meant to bruise or harm her. He was rather fond of her and he resolved to be much more careful. Yet it was fun, when he was in the state and so invisible to her because of his speed, to kiss her here and there in out-of-the-way places and show her other hallmarks of affection. She made a nice statue and it was good sport. And there were others.

"You look suddenly older," said one of his co-workers one day. "Are you taking care of yourself? Are you worried?"

"I am not," said Vincent. "I was never happier in my life."

But now there was time for so many things, in fact, everything. There was no reason why he could not master anything in the world, when he could take off for fifteen minutes and gain fifteen hours. Vincent was a rapid but careful reader. He could now read from a hundred and twenty to two hundred books in an evening and night; and he slept in an accelerated state and could get a full night's sleep in eight minutes.

He first acquired a knowledge of the languages. A quite extensive reading knowledge of a language can be acquired in three hundred hours of world time, or three hundred minutes (five hours) of accelerated time. And if one takes the tongues in order, from the most familiar to the most remote, there is no real difficulty. He acquired fifty for a starter, and could always add another any evening that he found he had a need for it.

And at the same time he began to assemble and consolidate

knowledge. Of literature, properly speaking, there are no more than ten thousand books that are really worth reading and falling in love with. These were gone through with high pleasure, and two or three thousand of them were important enough to be reserved for future rereading.

History, however, is very uneven. It is necessary to read texts and sources that for form are not worth reading. And the same with philosophy. Mathematics and science, pure or physical, could not, of course, be covered with the same speed. Yet, with time available, all could be mastered. There is no concept ever expressed by any human mind that cannot be comprehended by any other normal human mind, if time is available, and if it is taken in the proper order and context and with the proper preparatory work.

And often, and now more often, Vincent felt that he was touching the fingers of the secret. And always, when he came near it it had a little bit of the smell of the Pit.

For he had pegged out all the main points of the history of man, or rather most of the tenable, or at least possible theories of the history of man. It was hard to hold the main line of it: that double road of rationality and revelation that should lead always to a fuller and fuller development, to an unfolding and growth and perfectibility. Sometimes he felt that he was trespassing on the history of something other than man.

For the main line of the account was often obscure and all but obliterated, and traced through fog and miasma. Vincent had accepted the Fall of Man and the Redemption as the cardinal points of history. But he began to feel now that neither had happened only once, that both were of constant recurrence; that there was a hand reaching up from that old Pit with its shadow over man. And he came to picture that hand in his dreams — for his dreams were especially vivid when in the state — as a six-digitated monster reaching out. He began to realize that the thing he was caught in was dangerous and deadly.

Very dangerous.

Very deadly.

One of the weird books that he often returned to and which continually puzzled him was *The Relationship of Extradigitalism to Genius*, written by the man whose face he had never seen, in one of his manifestations.

It promised more than it delivered, and it intimated more than it said. Its theory was tedious and tenuous, holstered with undigested mountains of doubtful data. It left Vincent unconvinced that persons of genius — even if it could be agreed who or what they were — had often the oddity of extra fingers or toes, or the vestiges of them. And it puzzled him what possible difference it could make.

Yet there were hints here of a Corsican who commonly kept a hand hidden; of an earlier and more bizarre commander who always wore a mailed glove; of another man with a glove between the two; hints that the multiplex adept, Leonardo himself, who sometimes drew the hands of men and more often those of monsters with six fingers, had had the touch. There was a comment on Caesar, not conclusive, to the same effect.

It is known that Alexander had a minor deformity. It is not known what it was. This man made it seem that this was it. And it was averred of Gregory and Augustine, of Benedict and Albert and Aquinas. Yet a man with a deformity could not enter the priesthood; if they had it, it must have been in vestigial form.

There were cases for Charles Magnus and Mahmud, for Saladin the horseman and for Akhnaton the king; for Homer — a Seleucid-Greek statuette shows him with six fingers strumming an unidentified instrument while reciting; cases for Pythagoras, for Buonottoti, Santi, Theotokopolous, van Bijn, Robusti. And going farther back in time, and less subject to proof, they became much more numerous.

Zurbarin cataloged eight thousand of them. He maintained that they were geniuses. And that they were extra digitals.

Charles Vincent grinned and looked down at his misshapen or double thumb.

“At least I am in good though monotonous company. But what in the name of triple time is he driving at?”

And it was not long afterward that Vincent was examining cuneiform tablets in State Museum. These were a broken and not continuous series on the theory of numbers, tolerably legible to the now encyclopedic Charles Vincent. And the series read in part:

On the divergence of the basis itself and the confusion caused by — for it is Five, or it is Six, or Ten or Twelve, or Sixty or One Hundred, or Three hundred and Sixty or the Double Hundred, the Thousand. The reason,

not clearly understood by the People, is that Six and the Dozen are First, and Sixty is a compromise in condescending to the people.

For the Five, the Ten are late, and are no older than the People themselves. It is said, and credited, that the People began to count by Fives and Tens from the number of fingers on their hands. But before the People the —, for the reason that they had —, counted by Sixes and Twelves. But Sixty is the number of time, divisible by both, for both must live together in Time, though not on the same plane of time —

Much of the rest was scattered. It was while trying to set the hundreds of unordered clay tablets in proper sequence that Charles Vincent created the legend of the ghost in the museum.

For he spent his multi-hundred-hour nights there studying and classifying. Naturally he could not work without light, and naturally he could be seen when he sat still at his studies. But as the slow-moving guards attempted to close in on him, he would move to avoid them, and his speed made him invisible to them. They were a nuisance and had to be discouraged. He belabored them soundly and they became less eager to try to capture him.

His only fear was that they would sometime try to shoot him to see if he were ghost or human. He could avoid a seen shot which would come at no more than two and a half times his own greatest speed. But an unperceived shot could penetrate dangerously, even fatally, before he twisted away from it.

Vincent had fathered legends of other ghosts, that of the Central Library, that of the University Library, that of the John Charles Underwood Jr. Technical Library. This plurality of ghosts tended to cancel out each other and bring believers into ridicule. Even those who had seen him as a ghost did not admit that they believed in ghosts.

Charles Vincent had gone back to Dr. Mason for his monthly checkup.

“You look terrible,” said the doctor. “Whatever it is, you have changed. If you have the means you should, take a long rest.”

“I have the means, said Vincent, “and that is just what I will do. I’ll take a rest for a year or two.”

He had begun to begrudge the time that he must spend at the world’s pace. From this time on he was regarded as a recluse. He was silent and unsociable, for he found it a nuisance to come back to the common state to engage in conversation, and in his special state the voices were too

slow-pitched to intrude on his consciousness.

Except that of the man whose face he had never seen.

“You are making very tardy progress,” said the man. Once more they were in a dark club. “Those who do not show more progress we cannot use. After all, you are only a vestigial. It is probable that you have very little of the ancient race in you. Fortunately those who do not progress destroy themselves. You had not imagined that there were only two phases of time, had you?”

“Lately I have come to suspect that there are many more,” said Charles Vincent.

“And you understand that one step only cannot succeed?”

“I understand that the life that I have been living is in direct violation of all that we know of the laws of mass, momentum and acceleration, as well as those of conservation of energy, the potential of the human person, the moral compensation, the golden mean, and the capacity of human organs. I know that I cannot multiply energy and experience sixty times without increase of food intake, and yet I do it. I know that I cannot live on eight minutes of sleep in twenty-four hours, but I do that also. I know that I cannot reasonably crowd four thousand years of experience into one life time, yet unreasonably I do not see what will prevent it. But you say that I will destroy myself?”

“Those who take only the first step will destroy themselves.”

“And how does one take the second step?”

“At the proper moment you will be given the choice.”

“I have the most uncanny feeling that I will refuse the choice.”

“Yes from present indications you will refuse it. You are fastidious.”

“You have a smell about you, Old Man Without a Face. I know now what it is. It is the smell of the Pit.”

“Are you so slow to learn that? But that is its name.”

“It is the mud from the Pit, the same from which the clay tablets were found, from the old land between the rivers. I’ve dreamed of the six-fingered hand reaching up from that Pit and overshadowing us all. From that slime!”

“Do not forget that according to another recension Another made the People from that same slime.”

“And I have read, Old Man: ‘The People first counted by Fives and Tens from the number of fingers on their hands. Put before the People

the —, for the reason that they had —, counted by Sixes and Twelve, But time has left blanks on those tablets.”

“Yes. Time, in one of its manifestations, has deftly and with a purpose left those blanks.”

“I cannot discover the name of the thing that goes into one of those blanks. Can you?”

“I am part of the name that goes into one of those blanks.”

“And you are the Man without a Face. But why is it that you overshadow and control people? And to what purpose?”

“It will be long before you know those answers.”

“When the choice comes to me, it will bear very careful weighing. But tell me, Man without a Face who comes from the Pit, are not pits and men without faces very nineteenth-century Gothic?”

“There was a temper in that century that came very close to uncovering us.”

After that a chill descended on the life of Charles Vincent, for all that he still possessed his exceptional powers. And now he seldom indulged in pranks.

Except with Jennifer Parkey.

It was unusual that he should be drawn to her. He knew her only slightly in the common world, and she was at least fifteen years his senior. But she now appealed to him for her youthful qualities, and all his pranks with her were gentle ones.

For one thing this spinster did not frighten, nor did she begin the precaution of locking her doors, never having bothered with such things before. He would come behind her and stroke her hair, and she would speak out calmly with that sort of quickening in her voice:

“Who are you? Why won’t you let me see you? You are a friend, aren’t you? Are you a man, or are you something else? If you can caress me why can’t you talk to me? Please let me see you. I promise I won’t hurt you.”

It was as though she could not imagine that anything strange would hurt her. Or again when he hugged her or kissed her on the nape, she would call: “You must be a little boy, or very like a little boy, whoever you are. You are good not to break my things when you move about. Come here and let me hold you.”

It is only very good people who have no fear at all of the unknown.

When Vincent met Jennifer in the regular world, as he now more

often found occasion to do, she looked at him apprisingly, as though she guessed some sort of connection.

She said one day, "I know it is an impolite thing to say, but you do not look well at all. Have you been to a doctor?"

"Several times. But I think it is my doctor who should go to a doctor. He was always given to peculiar remarks. But now he is becoming a little unsettled."

"If I were your doctor, I believe that I would also become a little unsettled. But you should find out what is wrong. You look terrible."

He did not look terrible. He had lost his hair, it is true, but many men lose their hair by thirty, though not perhaps as suddenly as he had. He thought of attributing it to air resistance. After all, when he was in the state he did stride at some three hundred miles an hour. And enough of that is likely to blow the hair right off your head. And might that not also be the reason for his worsening complexion and the tired look that appeared in his eyes? But he knew that this was nonsense. He felt no more air pressure when in his accelerated state than when in his normal state.

He had received his summons. He chose not to answer it. He did not want to be presented with the choice; he had no wish to be one with those in the Pit. But he had no intention of giving up the great advantage which he now held over nature.

"I will have it both ways," he said. "I am already a contradiction and an impossibility. 'You can't have your confection and eat it too.' The proverb was only the early statement of the law of moral compensation. 'You can't take more out of a basket than it holds.' But for a long time I have been in violation of the laws and the balances. 'There is no road without a turning,' 'Those who dance will have to pay the fiddler,' 'Everything that goes up comes down.' But are proverbs really universal laws? Certainly. A sound proverb has the force of universal law, is but another statement of it. But I have contradicted the universal laws. It remains to be seen whether I have contradicted them with impunity.

"'Every action has its reaction.' If I refuse to deal with them, I will provoke a strong reaction. The Man without a Face said that it was always a race between full knowing and destruction. Very well, I will race them for it."

They began to persecute him then. He knew that they were in a state

as accelerated from his as his was from the normal. To them he was the almost motionless statue, hardly to be told from a dead man. To him they were by their speed both invisible and inaudible. They hurt him and haunted him. But still he would not answer their summons.

When the meeting took place, it was they who had to come to him, and they materialized there in his room, men without faces.

“The choice,” said one. “Well, you force us to be so clumsy as to have to voice it.”

“I will have no part of you,” said Charles Vincent. “You all smell of the Pit, of that old mud of the cuneiforms of the land between the rivers, of the people who were before the People.”

“It has endured a long time,” one of them said, “and we consider it as enduring forever. But the Garden, which was quite in the neighborhood — do you know how long the Garden lasted?”

“I don’t know.”

“Not even a day. It all happened in a single day, and before nightfall they were outside. You want to throw in with something more permanent, don’t you?”

“No. I don’t believe that I do.”

“What have you to lose?”

“Only my hope of eternity.”

“But you don’t believe in that. No man has ever really believed in eternity.”

“No man has ever either entirely believed or entirely disbelieved in it,” said Charles Vincent.

“At least it can never be proved,” said one of the faceless men. “Nothing is proved until it is over with. And in this case, if it is ever over with, then it is disproved. And all that time would one not be tempted to wonder ‘What if, after all, it ends in the next minute?’”

“I imagine, if we survive the flesh, we will receive some sort of surety,” said Vincent.

“But you are not sure either of surviving or receiving, nor could you accept the surety as sure. Now we have a very close approximation of eternity. When Time is multiplied by itself, and that repeated again and again, does that not approximate eternity?”

“I don’t believe that it does. But I will not be of you. One of you has said that I am too fastidious. So now will you say that you’ll destroy me?”



“No. we will only let you be destroyed. By yourself, you cannot win the race with destruction.”

After that Charles Vincent somehow felt more mature. He knew he was not really meant to be a poltergeist or a six-fingered thing out of the Pit. He knew that in some way he would have to pay for every minute and hour that he had gained. But what he had gained he would use to the fullest. And whatever could be accomplished by sheer acquisition of human knowledge, he would try to accomplish.

And he now startled Dr. Mason by the medical knowledge he had picked up, the while the doctor amused him by the concern he showed for Vincent. For he felt fine. He was perhaps not as active as he had been, but that was only because he had become dubious of aimless activities. He was still the ghost of the libraries and museums, but was puzzled that the published reports intimated that an old ghost had replaced a young one.

He now paid his mystic visits to Jennifer Parkey less often. For he was always dismayed to hear her exclaim to him in his ghostly form, “Your touch is so changed. You poor thing! Is there anything at all I can do to help you?”

He decided that somehow she was too immature to ever understand him, though he was still fond of her. He transferred his affections to Mrs. Milly Maitby, a widow at least thirty years his senior. Yet here it was a sort of girlishness in her that appealed to him. She was a woman of sharp wit and real affection, and she also accepted his visitations without fear, following a little initial panic.

They played games, writing games, for they communicated by writing. Milly would scribble a line, then hold the paper up in the air whence he would cause it to vanish into his sphere. He would return it in half a minute, or half a second of her time, with his retort. He had the advantage of her in time with greatly more opportunity to think up responses, but she had the advantage over him in natural wit and was hard to top.

They also played checkers, and he often had to retire apart and read a chapter of a book on the art between moves; and even so she often beat him. For natural talent is likely to be a match for accumulated lore and codified procedure.

But to Milly also he was unfaithful in his fashion, being now interested — he no longer became enamored or entranced — in a Mrs. Roberts, a

great-grandmother who was his elder by at least fifty years. He had read all the data extant on the attraction of the old for the young, but he still could not explain his successive attachments. He decided that these three examples were enough to establish a universal law: that a woman is simply not afraid of a ghost, though he touches her and is invisible, and writes her notes without hands. It is possible that amorous spirits have known this for a long time, but Charles Vincent had made the discovery himself independently.

When enough knowledge is accumulated on any subject, the pattern will sometimes emerge suddenly, like a form in a picture revealed where before it was not seen. And when enough knowledge is accumulated on all subjects, is there not a chance that a pattern governing all subjects will emerge?

Charles Vincent was caught up in his last enthusiasm. On one long vigil, as he consulted source after source and sorted them in his mind, it seemed that the pattern was coming out clearly and simply, for all its amazing complexity of detail.

“I know all that they know in the Pit,” said Vincent, “and I know a secret that they do not know. I have not lost the race — I have won it. I can defeat them at the point where they believe themselves invulnerable. If controlled hereafter, we need at least not be controlled by them. It is all falling together now. I have found the final truth and it is they who have lost the race. I hold the key. I will now be able to enjoy the advantage without paying the ultimate price of defeat and destruction, or of collaborating with them.

“Now I have only to implement my knowledge, to publish the fact, and one shadow at least will be lifted from mankind. I will do it at once. Well, nearly at once. It is almost dawn in the normal world. I will sit here a very little while and rest. Then I will go out and begin to make contact with the proper persons for the disposition of this thing. But first I will sit here a little while and rest.”

And he died quietly in his chair as he sat there.

Dr. Mason made an entry in his private journal:

Charles Vincent, a completely authenticated case of premature aging, one of the most clear-cut in all gerontology. This man was known to me for many years, and I here aver that as of one year ago he was of normal appearance and physical state, and that his chronology is also correct, I

having also known his father. I examined the subject during the period of his illness, and there is no question at all of his identity, which has also been established for the record by fingerprinting and other means. I aver that Charles Vincent at the age of thirty is dead of old age, having the appearance and organic state of a man of ninety.

Then the doctor began to make other notes: "As in two other cases of my own observation, the illness was accompanied by a certain delusion and series of dreams, so nearly identical in all three men as to be almost unbelievable. And for the record, and no doubt to the prejudice of my own reputation, I will set down the report of them here."

But when Dr. Mason had written that, he thought about it for a while.

"No, I will do no such thing," he said, and he struck out the last lines he had written. "It is best to let sleeping dragons lie."

And somewhere the faceless men with the smell of the Pit on them smiled to themselves in quiet irony.

## ADAM HAD THREE BROTHERS

In the town there are many races living; each in its own enclave, some of many square miles, some of a few acres only, some of but one or two streets. Its geographers say that it has more Italians than Rome, more Irish than Dublin, more Jews than Israel, more Armenians than Yerevan.

But this overlooks the most important race of all. There is the further fact (known only to the more intense geographers): it has more Rrequesenians than any town in the world. There are more than a hundred of them.

By the vulgar the Rrequesenians are called Wrecks, and their quarter is Wreckville. And there is this that can be said of them that cannot be said of any other race on earth: Every one of them is a genius.

These people are unique. They are not Gypsies, though they are often taken for them. They are not Semites. They are not even children of Adam.

Willy McGilley, the oldest of the Wrecks (they now use Gentile names) has an old baked tablet made of straw and pressed sheep dung that is eight thousand years old and gives the true story of their origin. Adam had three brothers: Etienne, Yancy, and Rreq. Etienne and Yancy were bachelors. Rreq had a small family and all his issue have had small families; until now there are about two hundred of them in all, the most who have ever been in the world at one time. They have never intermarried with the children of Adam except once. And not being of the same recension they are not under the same curse to work for a living.

So they do not.

Instead they batten on the children of Adam by clever devices that are known in police court as swindles.

Catherine O'Conneley by ordinary standards would be reckoned as the most beautiful of the Wrecks. By at least three dozen men she was considered the most beautiful girl in the world. But by Wreckian standards she was plain. Her nose was too small, only a little larger than that of ordinary women; and she was skinny as a crow, being on the slight side of a hundred and sixty. Being beautiful only by worldly standards she was reduced even more than the rest of them to living by her wits and charms.

She was a show girl and a bar girl. She gave piano lessons and drawing

lessons and tap-dancing lessons. She told fortunes and sold oriental rugs and junk jewelry, and kept company with lonely old rich men. She was able to do all these things because she was one bundle of energy.

She had no family except a number of unmarried uncles, the six Petapolis brothers, the three Petersens, the five Calderons, the four Oskamans; and Charley O'Malley, nineteen in all.

Now it was early morning and a lady knocked at her door.

"The oil stock is no good. I checked and the place would be three hundred miles out to sea and three miles down. My brother says I've been took."

"Possibly your brother isn't up on the latest developments in offshore drilling. We have the richest undeveloped field in the world and virtually no competition. I can promise we will have any number of gushers within a week. And if your brother has any money I can still let him have stock till noon today at a hundred and seventy-five dollars a share."

"But I only paid twenty-five a share for mine."

"See how fast it has gone up in only two days. What other stock rises so fast?"

"Well all right, I'll go tell him."

There was another knock on the door.

"My little girl take piano lessons for six weeks and all she can play is da da da."

"Good. It is better to learn one note thoroughly than just a little bit of all of them. She is not ready for the other notes yet. But I can tell you this: she is the most intelligent little girl I have ever seen in my life and I believe she has a positive genius for the piano. I truly believe she will blossom all at once and one of these days she will be playing complete symphonies."

You really think so?"

I do indeed."

"Well then I will pay you for six more weeks, but I do wish she could play more than da da da."

There was another knock at the door.

"Honey Bun, there was something wrong. I give you ten dollars to bet on Summertime in the first race at Marine Park; you say it's a sure thing and fifty to one. But now I find there isn't any such track as Marine Park and nobody ever heard of the horse. Huh, Honey Bun? What you do to

your best boy friend?”

“O, we use code names. What if all these hot tips ever got out? Summertime of course was Long Day and Marine Park was Jamaica. And he only lost by about six noses. Wasn't that good for a fifty to one? And now I have an even better tip. It's so hot I can't even tell you the name of the horse, but I feel sure that twenty would get you a thousand.”

“All the time I give you money but never I win yet, Honey Bun. Now you give a little kiss and we talk about another bet.”

“I had surely thought our attachment was on a higher plane.”

“Words, Honey Bun, always words. But you give, um, um, urn, that's good. Now I bet again, but I bet I better win someday.”

There was another knock on the door.

“How come you let my brother-in-law in on a good thing and never tell me? For a hundred he'll have two hundred and fifty in a week, and you never tell me, and I'm your friend and never persecute you when you don't pay your bill.”

So she had to give her caller the same deal she had given his brother-in-law.

After that she went out to take the game out of her traps. She had set and baited them some days before. She had gone to see five hundred people, which took quite a while even for one with her excess of energy. And to each she said this:

“I have just discovered that I have an infallible gift of picking winners. Now I want you to give it a test. Here is a sure winner I have picked. I ask you bet it, not with me, not with one of my uncles, but with a bookie of your own choice. I prefer not to know with whom you bet.”

Of the five hundred there were a hundred and forty-four winners, very good. So the next day she went to the hundred and forty-four with even more assurance and offered them the same proposition again. And of the hundred and forty-four there were fifty-six winners. Very good, for she really could pick them.

To these fifty-six she went the third day and offered them the third sure bet free. And incredibly of the fifty-six there were nineteen winners.

This was repeated the next day, and of the nineteen there were seven winners.

Now she went to talk money. The seven lucky clients could not deny that she indeed had the gift of picking winners. She had given them all

four straight in four days and her secret should surely be worth money. Besides, they had all let their bets ride and they had won a lot, an average of more than six hundred dollars.

But she would give no more free tips. She would only sell her complete and exclusive secret for a thousand dollars. And she collected from six of them. The seventh was Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

"I have given you four straight winners, but I cannot give you any more free tips. We will now talk cold turkey."

"I put it in a basket, Katie."

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"I learned it in my cradle. The Inverted Pyramid. You tapped five hundred, and you got besides me how many? Five?"

"Six besides you, seven in all." "Very good. You pick them nice for a little girl. But isn't that a lot of work for no more than a hatful of money?"

"Six thousand dollars is a large hatful. And there is always one smart alec like you who knows it all." "Now Kate dear, let's look at it this way. I can really pick all the winners, not seven straights in five hundred, but all five hundred if I wished."

"O hah, you can't fool this little-goose." "O, I could prove it easily enough, but that's showy and I hate to be a show-off. So I suggest that you take my word for it and share my secret with me and give up this penny ante stuff."

"And all you want for your sure thing secret is five thousand dollars or so?" "Why Kate, I don't want your money. I have so much that it's a burden to me. I only want to marry you."

She looked at him and she was not sure. O, not about marrying him, he was nice enough. She was not sure, she had never been sure, that he was a Wreck.

"Are you?"

"Why Kate, does one Wreck have to ask another that question?"

"I guess not. I'll go ask my uncles what they think. This is something of a decision."

She went to see all her bachelor uncles and asked them what they knew about Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

He was known to all of them.

"He is a competent boy, Kate," said Demetrio Petapolis. "If I do not miscount I once came out a little short on a deal with him. He knows the

Virginia City Version, he knows the old Seven-Three-Three, he can do the Professor and His Dog, and the Little Audrey. And he seems to be quite rich. But is he?”

He meant, not is he rich, but — is he a Wreck?

“Does one Wreck have to ask another that question?” said Kate.

“No, I guess not.”

Hodl Oskanian knew him too.

“That boy is real cute. It seems in the last deal I had with him he came out a little ahead. It seems that in every deal I have with him he comes out a little ahead. He knows the Denver Deal and the Chicago Cut. He does the Little Old Lady and the Blue Hat. He knows the Silver Lining and the Doghouse and the Double Doghouse. And he seems quite likeable. But is he?”

He meant, not was he likeable, but — was he a Wreck?

“Cannot one Wreck always tell another?” said Kate loftily.

Lars Petersen knew Mazuma too.

“He is a klog pog. He knows the Oslo Puds and the Copenhagen Streg. He knows the Farmer’s Wife and the Little Black Dog. He can do the Seventy-Three and the Supper Club. And he runs more tricks with the Sleepy River than anyone I ever saw, and has three different versions of the Raft and four of Down the Smoke Stack. And all the officers on the bilk squad give him half their pay every week to invest for them, He seems quite smart. But is he?”

He meant, not was he smart, but — is he a Wreck?

“Should one have to ask?” said Kate haughtily.

Her uncle Charley O’Malley also thought well of Mazuma.

“I am not sure but that at last count he was a raol or so ahead of me. He knows the Blue Eyed Drover and the Black Cow. He can do the Brandy Snifter with the best of them, and he isn’t bashful with the Snake Doctor. He does a neat variation of the Bottom of the Barrel. He can work the Yellow Glove and the Glastonburry Giveaway. And he seems affable and urbane. But is he?”

He meant, not was he affable and urbane (he was), but — is he a Wreck? Ah, that was the question.

“How can you even ask?” said Kate.

So they were married and began one of the famous love affairs of the century. It went on for four years and each day brought new high



adventure. They purged for the good of his soul a Dayton industrialist of an excessive sum of cash and thus restored his proper sense of values and taught him that money isn't everything. They toured the world in gracious fashion and took no more than their ample due for their comfortable maintenance. They relaxed the grip of tight-fisted Frenchmen and retaught them the stern virtues of poverty. They enforced an austere regime of abstinence and hard work on heretofore over-wealthy and over-weight German burghers and possibly restored their health and prolonged their lives. They had special stainless steel buckets made to bury their money in, and these they scattered in many countries and several continents. And they had as much fun as it is allowed mortals to have.

One pleasant afternoon Mazuma O'Shaunessey was in jail in a little town in Scotland. The jailer was gloomy and suspicious and not given to joking.

"No tricks from you now. I will not be taken."

"Just one to show I have the power. Stand back so I can't reach you."

"I'm not likely to let you."

"And hold up a pound note in one hand as tightly as you can. I will only flick my handkerchief and the note will be in my hand and no longer in yours."

"Man I defy you. You cannot do it."

He held the note very tightly and closed his eyes with the effort. Mazuma flicked his handkerchief, but the Scotsman was right. He could not do it. This was the only time that Mazuma ever failed. Though the world quivered on its axis (and it did) yet the note was held so tightly that no power could dislodge it. But when the world quivered on its axis the effect was that Mazuma was now standing outside the cell and the Scotsman was within. And when the Chief came some minutes later Mazuma was gone and the Scotch jailer stood locked in the cell, his eyes still closed and the pound note yet held aloft in a grip of steel. So he was fired, or cashiered as the Old Worlders call it, for taking a bribe and letting a prisoner escape. And this is what usually comes as punishment to overly suspicious persons.

Katie still used the Inverted Pyramid and very effectively Mazuma did not really have an unfailing talent for picking winners. He'd only said that to get Kate to marry him, and it was the best lie he ever told. But he did

have an infallible talent for many things, and they thrived.

The first little cloud in the sky came once when they passed a plowman in a field in the fat land of Belgium.

“Ah, there is a happy man,” said Mazuma. “Happy at work.”

“Happy at work? o my God, what did you say? What kind of words are these, my husband?”

But in the months and years that followed, this frightening incident was forgotten.

The couple became the pride of Wreckville when they returned as they did several times a year and told their stories. Like the time the state troopers ran them down and cornered them with drawn guns.

“o, we don’t want to take you in. We’ll report that we couldn’t catch you. Only tell us how you do it. We don’t want to be troopers all our lives.”

And the time they ran a little house in Faro Town itself. It was a small upstairs place and Katie played the piano, and they had only one bartender, a faded little blonde girl with a cast in one eye, and only one table where Mazuma presided. And this where all the other Casinos were palaces that would make Buckingham look like a chicken coop.

And the funny thing is that they took in no money at all. The barmaid would always say all drinks were ten dollars, or failing that they were on the house; as they used no coin and had trays in the register for only tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. It was too much trouble to do business any other way.

Katie would bait her money jar with several hundred dollar bills and one or two larger, and demurely refuse anything smaller for selections as she didn’t want the jar filled up with wrapping paper. So she would tinkle along all night and all drinks were on the house, which was not too many as only three could sit at the bar at once.

And Mazuma never shook or dealt a game. He had only blue chips as he said any other color hurt his eyes. And no matter what the price of the chips, it was legendary and gained zeros as it was retold.

Several of the larger sports came up the stairs out of curiosity. And their feelings were hurt when they were told they were too little to play, for they weren’t little at all. So Mazuma sat all night Monday through Friday and never cut a hand or shook a bone.

Then on Saturday night the really big boys came upstairs to see what

it was about. They were the owners of the nine big Casinos in town, and six of these gentlemen had to sit on boxes. Their aggregate worth would total out a dollar and thirteen cents to every inhabitant of the U.S.

Katie tinkled tunes all night for a hundred to five hundred dollars a selection, and Mazuma dealt on the little table. And when the sun came up they owned a share of all nine of the big Casinos, and had acquired other assets besides.

Of course these stories of Katie and Mazurna were topped, as about half the Wrecks went on the road, and they had some fancy narrations when they got back to Wreckville.

And then the bottom fell out of the world.

They had three beautiful children now. The oldest was three years old and he could already shake, deal, shuffle, and eon with the best of them. He knew the Golden Gambit and the Four Quarters and the Nine Dollar Dog and Three Fish Out. And every evening he came in with a marble bag full of half dollars and quarters that he had taken from the children in the neighborhood. The middle child was two, but already she could calculate odds like lightning, and she picked track winners in her dreams. She ran sucker ads in the papers and had set up a remunerative mail-order business. The youngest was only one and could not yet talk. But he carried chalk and a slate and marked up odds and made book, and was really quite successful in a small way. He knew the Four Diamond trick and the Two Story Chicken Coop, the Thimbling Reverse and the Canal Boat Cut. They were intelligent children and theirs was a happy home.

One day Mazuma said, "We ought to get out of it, Kate."

"Out of what?"

"Get out of the business. Raise the children in a more wholesome atmosphere. Buy a farm and settle down."

"You mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick? Is it old enough to be new yet? And it takes nearly three weeks to set it up, and it never did pay too well for all the trouble."

"No, I do not mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick. I don't mean any trick, swindle, or con. I think we should get out of the whole grind and go to work like honest people."

And when she heard these terrible words Katie fell into a dead faint.

That is all of it. He was not a Wreck. He was a common trickster and he had caught the sickness of repentance. The bottom had fallen out of

the world indeed. The three unsolvable problems of the Greeks were squaring the circle, trisecting the angle, and re-bottoming the world. They cannot be done.

They have been separated for many years. The three children were reared by their father under the recension and curse of Adam. One is a professor of mathematics, but I doubt if he can figure odds as rapidly as he could when he was one year old. The middle one is now a grand lady, but she has lost the facility of picking track winners in her dreams and much else that made her charming. And the oldest one is a senator from a state that I despise.

And Katie is now the wisest old witch in Wreckville. But she has never quite been forgiven her youthful indiscretion when she married an Adamite who felt like his ancient father and deigned to work for a living.

## SNUFFLES

### I

“I always said we’d find one of them that was fun remarked Brian. “There’s been entirely too much solemnity in the universe. Did you never panic on thinking of the multiplicity of systems?”

“Never,” said Georgina.

“Not even when, having set down a fine probability for the totality of worlds, you realized suddenly that you had to raise it by a dozen powers yet?”

“What’s to panic?”

“Not even when it comes over you, ‘This isn’t a joke; this is serious; every one of them is serious?’”

“‘Cosmic intimidation,’ Belloc called it And it does tend to minimize a person.”

“And did you never hope that out of all that prodigality of worlds, one at least should have been made for fun? One should have been made by a wild child or a mixed-up goblin just to put the rest of them in proper perspective, to deflate the pomposity of the cosmos.”

“You believe this is it, Mr. Carroll?”

“Yes. Bellota was made for fun. It is a joke, a caricature, a burlesque. It is a planet with baggy pants and a putty nose. It is a midget world with floppy shoes and a bull-roarer voice. It was designed to keep the cosmos from taking itself too seriously. The law of levity here conspires against the law of gravity.”

“I never heard of the law of levity. And Mr. Phelan believes that he will soon have the explanation for the peculiar gravity here.”

“The law of levity does not apply to you, Georgina. You are immune. But I spoke lightly.”

The theory that Bellota was made for a joke had not been proved; no more than the other theories about it. But it was a sport, a whole barrelful of puzzles, a place of interest all out of proportion to its size, eminently worthy of study. And the six of them had been set down there to study it.

Sociability impels — and besides they weren’t a bad bunch at all. Meet them now, or miss them forever. They were six.

1. John Hardy. Commander and commando. As capable a man as ever lived. A good-natured conglomerate of clanking iron who was always in control. A jack of all techniques, a dynamic optimist. He had the only

laugh that never irritated, however often heard, and he handled danger cavalierly. He was a blue-eyed, red-headed giant, and his face was redder than his hair.

2. William Malaquais (Uncle Billy) Cross. Engineer, machinist extraordinary, gadgeteer, theorist, arguer, first mate, navigator, and balladeer. Billy was a little older than the rest of them, but he hadn't mellowed. He said that he was still a green and growing boy.

3. Daniel Phelan. Geologist and cosmologist, and holder of heretical doctrines about field forces. "Phelan's Corollary" may be known to you; and, if so, you must be both intrigued and frustrated by the inherent contradictions that prevented its acceptance. A highly professional man in the domain of magnetism and gravity, he was so a low amateur rake and a determined wolf. A dude. Yet he could carry his share of the load.

4. Margaret Cot. Artist and photographer, botanist and bacteriologist. Full of chatter and a sort of charm. Better looking than anyone deserves to be. Salty, really the newest thing in salinity. A little bit wanton. And a little kiddish.

5. Brian Carroll. Naturalist. And natural. He had been hunting for something all his life, but did not know what it was, and was not sure that he would know it when he found it, but he hoped that it would be different.

"O Lord," he would pray, "however it ends don't let it have a pat ending. That I couldn't stand." He believed that anything repeated was trite. And it was for that reason that there were pleasant surprises for him on Bellota.

6. Georgina Chantal. Biologist and iceberg. But the capsule description may be unjust. For she was more than biologist and much more than iceberg. Frosty only when frostiness was called for, she was always proper and often friendly. But she was no Margie Cot, and in contrast perhaps she was a little icy.

Actually there wasn't a bad apple in that basket.

The most obvious peculiarity of Bellota was its gravity, which was half that of Earth's, though the circumference of the globe was no more than a hundred miles. It was on account of this peculiarity that Daniel Phelan was on the little planet in the first place. For it was held by those who decide such things that there was a bare chance that he could find the answer: no one else had found it. His own idea was that his presence

there was fruitless: he already had the answer to the gravity behavior of Bellota; it was contained in Phelan's Corollary. Bellota was the only body that behaved as it should. It was the rest of the universe that was atypical.

And in other ways Bellota was a joker. Fruits proved noisome and thorns succulent. Rinds and shells were edible and heartmeat was not. Proto-butterflies stung like hornets and lizards secreted honeylike manna. And the water — the water was soda water — sheer carbonated soda water.

If you wanted it any other way, you caught rain water, and this was so highly nitric that drinking it was something of an experience also; for the thunderstorms there were excessive.

No, they were not excessive, claimed Phelan, they were normal. It was on all other atmospheric planets known that there was a strange deficiency of thundershowers.

Here, at least, there was no deficiency: it rained about five minutes out of every fifteen, and the multi-colored lightning was omnipresent. In all their stay there, the party was never without the sound of thunder, near or distant, nor of the probe of lightning. For this reason there could be no true darkness there, not even between the flashes; there were flashes between the flashes. Here was meteorology concentrated, without dilution, without filler.

"But it is always different," said Georgina. "Every lightning flash is entirely different, just as every snowflake is different. Will it snow here?"

"Certainly," said Phelan. "Though it did not last night, it should tonight. Snow before midnight and fog by morning. After all, midnight and morning are only an hour apart."

At that time they had been on the planet only a few hours.

"And here the cycle is normal," said Phelan. "It is normal nowhere else. It is natural for humans and all other creatures to sleep for two hours and to wake for two hours. That is the fundamental cycle. Much of our misbehavior and perversity comes from trying to adapt to the weird day-night cycle of whatever alien world we happened to be born on. Here within a week we will return to that normal that we never knew before."

"Within what kind of week?" asked Hardy.

"Within Bellota's twenty-eight-hour week. And do you realize that the projected working week here would be just six and two-thirds hours? I always thought that that was long enough to work anyhow."

There were no seas there, only the soda-water lakes that covered a third of the area. And there were flora and fauna that burlesqued more than they really resembled Earth's and kindred worlds.

The trees were neither deciduous nor evergreen (though Brian Carroll said that they were ever-green), nor palm. They were trees as a cartoonist might draw them. And there were animals that made the whole idea of animals ridiculous.

And there was Snuffles.

Snuffles was a bear - possibly — and of sorts. The bear is himself a caricature of animalkind, somehow a giant dog, somehow a shaggy man, an ogre, and also a toy. And Snuffles was a caricature of a bear.

Billy Cross tried to explain to them about bears. Billy was an old bear man.

“It is the only animal that children dream of without having seen or been told about. Moncrief by his recall methods has studied thousands of early childhood dreams. Children universally dream of bears, Tahitian children subject to no ursine influence in themselves or their ancestry, Australian children, town tikes before they ever saw a bear toy. They dream of bears. The bear is the boogerman. Bears live in the attics of old childhood houses. They did in my own and in thousands of others. Their existence there is not of adult suggestion, but of innate childhood knowledge.

“But there is a duality about this boogerman. He is friendly and fascinating as well as frightening. The boogerman is not a story that adults tell to children. It is the only story that children tell to adults who have forgotten it.”

“But how could you know?” asked Margie Cot. “I had no idea that little boys dreamed of bears. I thought that only girls did. And with us I had come to believe that the bear dreams symbolized grown man in his fundamental aspect, both fascinating and frightening.”

“To you, Marie, everything symbolizes grown man in his fundamental aspect. Now the boogerman is also philologically interesting, being actually one of the less than two hundred Indo-European root words. Though Bog has come to mean God in the Slavic, yet the booger was earlier an animal-man demiurge, and the Sanskrit bhaga is not without this meaning. In the sense of a breaker, a smasher, it is in the Old Irish as bong, and the early Lithuanian as banga. In the sense of a devourer, it



survives in the Greek root phag, and as one who puts to flight it is in the Latin fug. We have, of course, the Welsh bwg, a ghost, and bogey has been used in the meaning of the devil. And we have bugbear, which rounds out the circuit.”

“So you make God and the Bear and the Devil one,” said Georgina.

“In many mythologies it was the bear who made the world,” said John Hardy. “After that he did nothing distinguished. It was felt by his devotees that he had done enough.”

Snuffles was not a bear exactly. He was a pseudoursine. He was big and clumsy, and bounced around on four legs, and then up on two. He was friendly, chillingly so, for he was huge. And he snuffled like some old track-eating train.

He was a clown, but he seemed to observe the line that the visitors drew. He did not come really close, though often too close for comfort. He obeyed, or when he did not wish to obey, he pretended to misunderstand. He was the largest animal on Bellota, and there seemed to be only one of him.

“Why do we call him he?” asked Brian Carroll, the naturalist. “Only surgery could tell for sure, but it appears that Snuffles has no sex at all. There is no way I know of that he could reproduce. No wonder there is only one of him; the wonder is that there should be any at all. Where did he come from?”

“That could be asked of any creature,” said Daniel Phelan. “The question is, where is he going? But he shows a certain sophistication in this. For it is only with primitives that toy animals (and he is a toy, you know) are sexed. A modern teddy bear or a toy panda isn’t. Nor were the toys in the European tradition except on the fringes (Tartary before the ninth century, Ireland before the fifth) since pre-classical times. But before those times in its regions, and beyond its pale even to-day, the toy animals are totems and are sexed, exaggeratedly so.”

“Yes, there is no doubt about it,” said Brian. “He does not have even the secondary characteristics of mammal, marsupial, or what you will. But he has characteristics enough of his own.

Snuffles was, among other things, a mimic. Should a book he left around, and they were a bookish bunch, he would take it in his forepaws and hold it as to read, and turn the pages, turning them singly and carefully. He could use his padded paws as hands. His claws were

retractable and his digits projective. They were paws, or they were claws, or they were hands and he had four of them.

He unscrewed caps and he could use a can opener He kept the visitors in firewood, once he understood that they had need of it, and that they wanted dry sticks of a certain size. He'd bite the sticks to length, stack them in small ricks, bind them with lianas, and carry them to the fire. He'd fetch water and put it on to boil. And he gathered bellotas by the bushel.

Bellota means an acorn, and they had named the planet that from the profusion of edible fruit-nuts that looked very like the acorn. These were a delicacy that became a staple.

And Snuffles could talk. All his noises were not alike. There was the "snokle, snoke, snokle" that meant he was in a good humor, as he normally was. There was a "snook, snook" and a "snoff." There were others similar in vocables but widely varied in tone and timbre. Perhaps Billy Cross understood him best, but they all understood him a little.

In only one thing did Snuffles become stubborn. He marked off a space, a wild old pile of rocks, and forbade them to enter its circle. He dug a trench around it and he roared and bared foot-long fangs if any dared cross the trench. Billy Cross said that Snuffles did this to save face; for Commander John Hardy had previously forbidden Snuffles a certain area, their supply dump and weapons center. Hardy had drawn a line around it with a mattock and made it clear that Snuffles should never cross that line. The creature understood at once, and he went and did likewise.

The party had been set down there for two Earth weeks — twelve Bellota weeks — to study the life of the planetoid, to classify, to take samples, tests, notes, and pictures; to hypothesize and to build a basis for theory. But they ventured hardly at all from their original camp site. There was such an amazing variety of detail at hand that it would take many weeks even to begin to classify it.

A feature there was the rapidity of enzyme and bacterial action. A good wine could be produced in four hours, and a fungus-cheese made from grub exudations in even less time. And in the new atmosphere thoughts also seemed to ferment rapidly.

"Every person makes one major mistake in his life," said John Hardy to them once. "Were it not for that, he would not have to die."

“What?” quizzed Phelan. “Few die violently nowadays. How could all die for a mistake?”

“Yet it’s a fact. Deaths are not really explained, for all the explanations of medicine. A death will be the result of one single much earlier rashness, of one weakening of the mind or body, or a crippling of the regenerative force. A person will be alive and vital. And one day he will make one mistake. In that moment the person begins to die. But if a man did not make that one mistake, he would not die.”

“Poppycock,” said Daniel Phelan.

“I wonder if you know the true meaning of ‘poppycock?’” asked Billy Cross. “It is poppy-talk, opium-talk, rambling of one under the narcotic. Now the element ‘cock’ in the word is not (as you would imagine) from either the Norwegian kok, a dung heap, nor from coquarde in the sense that Rabelais uses it, but rather from —”

“Poppycock,” said Phelan again. He disliked Billy Cross’s practice of analyzing all words, and he denied his assertion that a man who uses a word without feeling its full value is a dealer in false coinage, in fact a liar.

“But if a person dies only by making a mistake, how does an animal die?” asked Margie Cot. “Does he also make a mistake?”

“He makes the mistake of being an animal and not a man,” said Phelan.

“There may be no clear line between animal and man,” Margie argued.

“There is,” said Phelan, and three others agreed.

“There is not,” said Billy Cross

“An animal is paradoxically a creature without an anima — without a soul,” said Phelan. “This comes oddly from me because I also deny it to man in its usual connotation. But there is a total difference, a line that the animal cannot cross, and did not cross. When we arrive at wherever we are going, he will still be skulking in his den.”

“Here, at least, it is the opposite of that,” said Brian Carroll. “Snuffles sleeps in the open, and it is we who den.”

It was true. Around their campsite, their supply dump and weapons center, there were three blind pockets; grottoes hack in the rocks. Billy Cross, Daniel Phelan and Margie Cot each had one of these, filled with the tools of their specialties. Here they worked and slept. And these were dens.

John Hardy himself slept in the weapons center, inside the circle

where Snuffles was forbidden. And the hours that he did not sleep he kept guard. Hardy made a fetish of security. When he slept, or briefly wandered about the region, someone else must always take a turn at guard, weapon at hand. There was no relaxation of this, no exception, no chance of a mistake.

And Snuffles, the animal, who slept right out in the open (“Is it possible,” Brian asked himself, “that I am the only one who notices it? Is it possible that it happens?”) did not get wet. It rained everywhere on that world. But it did not rain on Snuffles.

“The joy of this place is that it is not pat,” said Brian Carroll. As previously noted, he hated anything that was pat. “We could be here for years and never see the end of the variety. With the insects there may be as many species as there are individuals. Each one could almost be regarded as a sport, as if there were no standard to go by. The gravity here is cock-eyed. Please don’t analyze the word, Billy; I doubt myself that it means rooster-eyed. The chemistry gives one a hopeful feeling. It uses the same building blocks as the chemistry elsewhere, but it is as if each of those blocks were just a little off. The lightning is excessive, as though whoever was using it had not yet tired of the novelty; I never tired of the novelty of lightning myself. And when this place ends, it will not have a pat ending. Other globes may turn to lava or cold cinders. Bellota will pop like a soap bubble, or sag like spaghetti, or turn into an exploding world of grasshoppers. But it won’t conform. I love Bellota. And I do hate a pat ending.”

“There is an old precept of ‘Know thyself,’” said Georgina Chantal. They talked a lot now, as they were often wakeful, not yet being accustomed to the short days and nights of Bellota. “Its variant is ‘Look within.’ Look within, but our eyes point outward! The only way we can see our faces is in a mirror or in a picture. Each of us has his mirror, and mine is more often the microscope. But we cannot see ourselves as we are until we see ourselves distorted. That is why Snuffles is also a mirror for all of us here. We can’t understand why we’re serious until we know why he’s funny.”

“We may be the distortion and he the true image,” said Billy Cross. “He lacks jealousy and pomposity and greed and treachery — all the distortions.”

“We do not know that he lacks them,” said Daniel Phelan.

So they talked away the short days and nights on Bellota, and accumulated data.

## II

When it happened, it happened right in narrow daylight. The phrase was Brian's, who hated a pat phrase. It happened right in the middle of the narrow two-hour Bellota day.

All were awake and aware. John Hardy stood in the middle of the weapons center on alert guard with that rifle cradled in the crook of his arm. Billy and Daniel and Margaret were at work in their respective dens; and Brian and Georgina, who did not den, were gathering in-sects at the open lower end of the valley, but they had the center in their sight.

There was an unusual flash of lightning, bright by even Bellota standards, and air snapped and crackled. And there was an unusual sound from Snuffles, far removed from his usual "snokle, snokle" talk.

And in a moment benignity seemed to drain away from that planet.

Snuffles had before made as if to cross the line, and then scooted off, chortling in glee, which is perhaps why the careful John Hardy was not at first alarmed. Then Snuffles charged with a terrifying sound.

But Hardy was not tricked entirely; it would be impossible for man or beast to trick him entirely. He had a split second, and was not one to waste time making a decision; and he was incapable of panic. What he did, he did of choice. And if it was a mistake, why, even the shrewdest decision goes into the books as a mistake if it fails.

He was fond of Snuffles and he gambled that it would not be necessary to kill him. It was a heavy rifle; a shoulder shot should have turned the animal. If it did not, there would not be time for another shot.

It did not, though, and there was not. Commander John Hardy made one mistake and for that he died. He died uncommonly, and he did not die from the inside out, as meaner men do.

It was ghastly, but it was over in an instant. Hardy's head was smashed and his face nearly swiped off. His back was broken and his body almost sheared in two. The great creature, with the foot-long canines and claws like twenty long knives, mangled him and crushed him and shook him like a red mop, and then let go.

It may be that Brian Carroll realized most quickly the implications. He called to Georgina to come out of the valley onto the plain below, and to come out fast. He realized that the other three still alive would not even be able to come out.

Incongruously, a thing that went through Brian Carroll's mind was a

tirade of an ancient Confederate general against ancient General Grant, to the effect that the blundering fool had moved into a position that commanded both river and hill and blocked three valley mouths, and it could only be hoped that Grant would move along before he realized his advantage.

But Brian was under no such delusion. Snuffles realized his advantage; he occupied the supply dump and weapons center, and commanded the entrances to the three blind pockets that were the dens of Billy Cross and Daniel Phelan and Margie Cot.

With one move, Snuffles had killed the leader, cornered three of the others, and cut off the remaining two from base weapons, to be hunted down later. There was nothing unintentional about it. Had he chosen another moment, when another than John Hardy was on guard, then Hardy alive would still somehow have been a threat to him, even weaponless. But, with Hardy dead, all the rest were no match for the animal.

Brian and Georgina lingered on the edge of the plain to watch the other three, though they knew that their own lives depended on getting out of there.

“Two could get away,” said Georgina, “if a third would make a rush for it and force Snuffles into another charge.”

“But none of them will,” said Brian. “The third would die.”

It was a game, but it couldn't last long. Phelan whimpered and tried to climb the rock wall at the blind end of his pocket. Margie cajoled and told Snuffles how good friends they had always been, and wouldn't he let her go? Billy Cross filled his pipe and lit it and sat down to wait it out.

Phelan went first, and he died like a craven. But no one, not sure how he himself might die, should hold that overly against a man.

Snuffles thundered in, cut him down in the middle of a scream, and rushed back to his commanding spot in the middle of the weapons center.

Margie spread out her hands and began to cry, softly, not really in terror, when he attacked. The pseudo-bear broke her neck, but with a blow that was almost gentle in comparison with the others, and he scurried again to center.

And Billy Cross puffed on his pipe. “I hate to go like this, Snuff, old boy. In fact, I hate to go at all. If I made a mistake to die for, it was in being such a pleasant, trusting fellow. I wonder if you ever noticed, Snuff,

what a fine, upstanding fellow I really am?”

And that was the last thing Billy Cross ever said, for the big animal struck him dead with one tearing blow. And the smoke still drifted in the air from Billy’s pipe.

Then it was like black thunder coming out of the valley after the other two, for that clumsy animal could move. They had a start on him, Brian and Georgina had, of a hundred yards. And soon their terror subsided to half-terror as they realized that the shoulder-shot bear animal could not catch them till they were exhausted.

In a wild run, they could even increase their lead over him. But they would tire soon and they did not know when he would tire. He had herded them away from the campsite and the weapons. And they were trapped with him on a small planet.

Till day’s end, and through the night, and next day (maybe five hours in all) he followed them, until they could hardly keep going. Then they lost him, but in the dark did not know if he was close or not. And at dawn they saw him sitting up and watching them from quarter of a mile away.

But now the adversaries rested and watched. The animal may have stiffened up from his shot. The two humans were so weary that they did not intend to run again till the last moment.

“Do you think there is any chance that it was all a sudden fury and that he may become friendly again.”

Georgina asked Brian.

“It was not a sudden fury. It was a series of very calculated moves.”

“Do you think we could skirt around and beat him back to the weapons center?”

“No. He has chosen a spot where he can see for miles. And he has the interceptor’s advantage — any angle we take has to be longer than his. We can’t beat him back and he knows it.”

“Do you think he knows that the weapons are weapons?”

“Yes.”

“And that all our signal equipment is left at the center and that we can’t communicate?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think he’s smarter than we are?”

“He was smarter in selecting his role. It is better to be the hunter than the hunted. But it isn’t unheard of for the hunted to outsmart the hunter.”



“Brian, do you think you would have died as badly as Daniel or as well as Billy?”

“No. No to both.”

“I was always jealous of Margie, but I loved her at the end. She didn’t scream. She didn’t act scared. Brian, what will happen to us now?”

“Possibly we will be saved in the nick of time by the Marines.”

“I didn’t know they had them any more. Oh, you mean the ship. But that’s still a week away, Earth time. Do you think Snuffles knows it is to come back for us?”

“Yes, he knows. I’m sure of that”

“Do you think he knows when it will come?”

“Yes, I have the feeling that he knows that too.”

“But will he be able to catch us before then?”

“I believe that all parties concerned will play out the contest with one eye on the clock.”

Snuffles had now developed a trick. At sundown of the short day, he would give a roar and come at them. And they would have to start their flight just as the dark commenced. They ran more noisily than he and he would always be able to follow them; but they could never be sure in the dark that he was following, or how closely. They would have to go at top panting, gasping, thumping speed for an hour and a half; then they would ease off for a little in the half hour before dawn. And in the daytime one of them had to watch while the other slept. But Snuffles could sleep as he would, and they were never able to slip away without his waking instantly.

Moreover, he seemed to herd them through the fertile belt in their night runs and let them rest on the barrens in the daytime. It wasn’t that food was really scarce; it was that it could only be gathered during time taken from flight and sleep and guard duty.

They also came on a quantity of red fruit that had a weakening and dizzying effect on them, yet they could hardly leave it alone. There was a sort of bean sprout that had the same effect, and a nut, and a cereal grass whose seed they winnowed with their hands as they went along.

“This is a narcotic belt,” said Brian. “I wish we had the time to study it longer, and yet we may get all too much of studying it. We have no idea how far it goes, and this method of testing its products on ourselves may be an effective one, but dangerous.”

From that time on, they were under the influence of the narcotics. They dreamed vividly while awake and walking. And they began to suffer hallucinations which they could not distinguish from reality.

It was only a Bellota day or so after their dreaming began that Brian Carroll felt that the mind of Snuffles was speaking to him. Carroll was an intelligent amateur in that field and he put it to the tests; there are valid tests for it. And he concluded that it was hallucination and not telepathy. Still (and he could see it coming) there would be a time when he would accept his hallucination and believe that the ursine was talking to him. And that would signal that he was crazy and no longer able to evade death there.

Carroll renounced (while he still had his wits) his future belief in the nonsense, just as a man put to torture may renounce anything he concedes or confesses or denies under duress.

Yet, whatever frame it was placed in, Snuffles talked to him from a distance. “Why do you think me a bear, because I am in a bear skin? I do not think you a mam though you are in a man skin. You may be a little less. And why do you believe you will die more bravely than Daniel? The longer you run, the nearer will be your death. And you still do not know who I am?”

“No,” said Brian Carroll aloud.

“No what?” asked Georgina Chantal.

“It seems that the bear is talking to me, that he has entered my mind.”

“Me also. Could it be, or is it the narcotic fruit?”

“It couldn’t be. It is hallucination brought on by the narcotics, and tiredness from travel, and lack of sleep — and our shock at seeing our friends killed by a boy turned into a monster. There are tests to distinguish telepathic reception from hallucination: objective corroboration, impossible at this time (with Snuffles in his present mood) and probably impossible at any time; sentient parallelism — surely uncertain, for I have more in common with millions of humans than with one pseudo-ursine; circumstantial validity and point-for-point clarity — this is negative, for I know myself to be fevered and confused and my senses unreliable in other matters. By every test that can be made, the indication is that it is not telepathy, that it is hallucination.”

“But there isn’t any way to be sure, is there, Brian?”

“None, Georgina; no more than I can prove that it is not a troup of

Boy Scouts around a campfire that is causing pain and burning in my gullet, that it is really the narcotic fruit or something else I have eaten conspiring with my weariness and apprehension to discomfort me. I cannot prove it is not Boy Scouts and I cannot prove it is not telepathy, but I consider both unlikely.”

“I don’t think it is unlikely at all, Brian. I think that Snuffles is talking to me. When you get a little nuttier and tireder, then you’ll believe it too.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll believe it then — but it won’t be true.”

It won’t matter if it’s true or not. Snuffles will have gained his point. Do you know that Snuffles is king of this world?”

“No. What are you talking about?”

“He just told me he was. He told me that if I would help him catch you, he would let me go. But I won’t do it. I have become fond of you, Brian. Did you know I never did like men before?”

“Yes. You were called the iceberg.”

“But now I like you very much.”

“You have no one else left to like.”

“It isn’t that. It’s the mood I’m in. And I won’t help Snuffles catch you unless he gives me very much better reasons for it.”

Damn the girl! If she believed Snuffles talked to her, then for all practical purposes he did. And, however the idea of a trade for her life had been implanted in her mind, it would grow there.

Now Snuffles talked to Brian Carroll again, and it was somehow a waste of time to intone the formality that it was hallucination only.

“You still do not know what I am, but you will have to learn it before you die. Hardy knew it at the last minute. Cross guessed it from the first. Phelan still isn’t sure. He goes about and looks back at his body lying there, and he still isn’t sure. Some people are very hard to convince. But the girl knew it and she spread out her hands.”

In his fever, that was the way the bear animal talked to him.

They ate leaves now and buds. They would have no more of the narcotic fruits even if they had to starve. But narcosis left them slowly, and the pursuit of them tightened.

It was just at sunset one day that disaster struck at Brian. The bear had nearly hypnotized him into immobility, talking inside his head. Georgina had started on before him and repeatedly called for him to follow but for some reason he loitered. When Snuffles made his sudden

sundown charge, there seemed no escape for him. Brian was trapped on a rimrock. Georgina had already taken a winding path to the plain below. Brian hesitated, then held his ground for the bruin's charge. He believed that he could draw Snuffles on, and then break to the left or the right at the last instant, and perhaps the animal would plunge over the cliff.

But old Snuff modified but did not halt his charge the last minute. He came in bottom-side first, like an elephant sliding bases, and he knocked Brian off the cliff.

There are few really subjective accounts of dying, since most who die do not live to tell about it. But the way it goes is this:

First one hangs in space; then he is charged by the madly rising ground armed with trees and rocks and weapons. After that is a painful sleep, and much later dazed wakening.

### III

He was traveling upside-down, that was sure, and roughly, though at a slow rate of speed. Perhaps that is the normal way for people to travel after they are dead. He was hung from the middle in an odd doubled-up manner, and seemed supported and borne along by something of a boatlike motion, yet of a certain resilience and strength that was more living than even a boat. It had a rough softness, this thing, and a pleasant fragrance.

But, though it was bright morning now, it was hard to get a good look at the thing with which he was in contact. All he could see was grass flowing slowly by, and heels.

Heels?

What was this all about? Heels and backs of calves, no more.

He was being carried, carried slung like a sack over her shoulder by Georgina. For the thing of the pleasant fragrance was Georgina Chantal.

She set him down then. It was a very rough valley were in, and he saw that they had traveled perhaps four miles from the base of the rimrock; and Snuffles had settled down in the morning light a quarter of a mile behind them.

"Georgina, did you carry me all night?"

"Yes."

"How could you?"

"I changed shoulders sometimes. And you aren't very heavy. This is only a half-gravity planet. Besides, I'm very strong. I could have carried

you even on Earth.”

“Why wasn’t I killed by the fall?”

“Snuffles says he isn’t ready to kill you yet, that he could kill you any time he wanted to with the lightning or rock or poison berry. But you did hit terribly hard. I was surprised to be able to pick you up in one piece. And now Snuffles says that I have lost my last chance.”

“How?”

“Because I carried you away from him before he could get down the cliff in the dark. Now he says he will kill me too.”

“Snuff is inconsistent. If he could kill me any instant with the lightning, why would he be angered if you carried me away from him?”

“I thought of that too. But he says he has his own reasons. And that lightning — do you know that it doesn’t lighten all the time everywhere on Bellota? Only in a big circle around Snuffles, as a tribute to him. I’ve noticed myself that when we get a big lead over him, we almost move clear out of the lightning sphere.”

“Georgina, that animal doesn’t really talk to us. It is only our imaginations. It is not accurate to so personify it.”

“It may not be accurate, but if that isn’t talk he puts out, then I don’t know talk. And a lot of his talk he makes comes true. But I don’t care if he does kill me for saving you. I’m silly over you now.”

“We are both of us silly, Georgina, from the condition we are in. But he can’t talk to us. He’s only an animal run amok. If it was anything else, it would mean that much of what we know is not so.”

Brian had the full effect of it one sunny afternoon couple of Bellota days later. He was dozing and Georgina was on guard when Snuffles began to talk inside his head.

“You insult me that you do not recognize my identity. When Hardy said that in many mythologies it was the Bear who made the world, he had begun to guess who I was. I am the creator and I made the world. I have heard that there are other worlds besides Bellota, and I am not sure whether I made them or not. But if they are there, I must have made them. They could not have made themselves. And this I did make.

“It isn’t an easy thing, or all of you would have made them, and you have not. And there is pride in creation that you could not understand. You said that Bellota was made for fun. It was not made for fun. I am the only one who knows why it was made, for I made it. And it is not a little

planet; it is a grand planet. I waited for you to confess your error and be amazed at it. Since you did not, you will have to die. I made you, so I can kill you if I like. I must have made you, since I made all. And if I did not, then I made other things, red squirrels and white birds.

“You have no idea of the achievement itself. I had very little to work with and no model or plans or previous experience. And I made mistakes. I would be the last to deny that I miscalculated the gravity, a simple mathematical error that anyone could make. The planet is too small for the gravity, but I had already embodied the calculated gravity in other works that I did not choose to undo, and I had no material to make a larger planet. So what I have made I have made, and it will continue so. An error, once it is embodied, becomes a new truth.

“You may wonder why my birds have hair. I will confess it, I did not know how to make feathers, nor would you without template or typus. And you are puzzled that my butterflies sting and my hornets do not? But how was I to know that those fearfully colored monsters should have been harmless? It ill befits one who has never made even the smallest — but why do I try to explain this to you?

“You wonder if I am talking to you or if it is only a delusion of your mind. What is the difference? How could there be anything in your mind if I did not put it there? And do not be afraid of dying. Remember that nothing is lost. When I have the pieces of you, I will use them to make other things. That is the law of conservation of matter as I understand it.

“But do you know that the one thing desired by all is really praise? It is the impelling force, and a creator needs this more than anyone. Things and beings are made to give praise, and if they do not, they are destroyed again. You had every opportunity to give it, and instead you jeered.

“Did any of you ever make a world? I tell you that there are a million things to remember all at once. And there can be no such thing as a bad world, since each of them is a triumph. Whether it was that I made the others and I forgot them is only a premise; or whether I will make them in the future, and they are only now talked of out of their proper time. But some of your own mythologies indicate that I made your own.

“I would tell you more, only you would not understand it. But after I have conserved your matter, then you will know all these things.”

“Snuffles is cranky with me today,” said Georgina Chantal. “Is he also cranky with you?”

“Yes,” said Brian Carroll.

“He says that he made Bellota. Did he tell you that too? Do you believe it?”

“He told me. I do not believe it. We are delirious. Snuffles cannot communicate.”

“You keep saying that, but you aren’t sure. He told me that when he chews us up he will take a piece of me and a piece of you and chew them together and make a new thing, since we are belatedly taken with each other. Isn’t that nice?”

“How cozy.”

“I wonder why he made the grass so sharp, though. There is no reason for it to be like that.”

“Why, and what?”

“Snuffles. Why did he make the grass so sharp? My toes are nearly gone and it’s killing me.”

“Georgina, hold onto what’s left of your mind. Snuffles did not make the grass or anything else. He is only an animal, and we are sick and walking in delirium.” So they walked on a while, for evening had come. Then the voice of Snuffles came again inside the head of Brian.

“How was I to know that the grass should not be sharp? Are not all pointed things sharp? Who would have guessed that it should be soft? If you had told me gently, and without shaming me, I would have changed it at once. Now I will not. Let it wound you!”

So they walked on a while, for evening had come. Then days and nights.

“Brian, do you think that Snuffles knows the world is round?”

“If he made it, he must know it.”

“Oh, yes, I had forgotten.”

“Dammit, girl, I was being ironic! And you are now quite nutty, and I hardly less so. Of course he didn’t make it. And of course he doesn’t know that it’s round. He’s only an animal.”

“Then we have an advantage back again.”

“Yes. I’d noticed it before if I hadn’t been so confused. We are more than halfway around the little planet. He is no longer between us and our weapons center, but he behaves as though he thought he was. We have no more than forty miles to go to it. We will step up our pace, though gradually. Our old camp valley is prominent enough so that we could

recognize it within several miles either way, and we can navigate that close. And if he seems to say in your mind that he is onto our trick, do not believe him. The animal does not really talk in our minds.”

But their narcosis still increased. “It isn’t a narcotic belt,” said Brian. “It is a narcotic season on all Bellota - a built-in saturnalia. But we have not been able to enjoy the carnival.”

“Snuffles shows up well as a carnival king, though, don’t you think? It is easier to believe in time of carnival that he made the cosmos. I went to the big carnival once in Nola when I was a little girl. There was a big bear wearing a crown on one of the floats, and I believe that he was king of the carnival. It wasn’t an ordinary bear. I am sure now that it represented Snuffles, though I was only six years old when I saw it. Do you think that Snuffles’ explanation of the law of gravity here is better than Phelan’s?”

“More easily understandable at least than the corollary, and probably more honest. I always thought that the corollary also embraced a simple mathematical error and that Phelan stuck to it out of perversity.”

“It is one thing to stick to an error. It is another to build a world to conform to it. Brian do you know what hour it is?”

“It is the three hundred and twelfth since we were set down.”

“And they return for us at the three hundred and thirty-sixth. We will be back at our campsite and in control by then, won’t we?”

“If we are ever to make it back and be in control, we should make it by then. Are you tired, Georgina?”

“No. I will never be tired again. I have been walking in a dream too long for that. But I never felt more pleasurable than now. I look down at my feet which are a sorry mess, but they don’t seem to be my feet. Only a little while ago I felt sorry for a girl in such a state, and then I came to half realize that the girl was me. But the realization didn’t carry a lot of conviction. It doesn’t seem like me.”

“I feel disembodied myself. But I don’t believe that this comical old body that I observe will carry me much farther.”

“Snuffles is trying to talk to us.”

“Yes, I feel him. No, dammit, Georgina, we will not give in to that nonsense. Snuffles is only a wounded old bear that is trailing us. But our hallucination is coming again. It will take a lot of theory to cover a dual hallucination.”

“Hush, I want to hear what he says.”



Then Snuffles began to talk inside the heads of the two of them.

“If you know and do not tell me, then you are guilty of a peculiar affront. A maker cannot remember everything, and I had forgotten some of the things that I had made before. But we are coming on a new world now that is very like Bellota. Can it be that I have only repeated myself, and that I did not improve each time? These hills here I made once before. If you know, then you must tell me now. It may be that I cannot wait to chew your brains to find out about it. How will I ever make a better world if I make them all alike?”

“He has forgotten that he made it round, Brian.”

“Georgina, he did not make anything. It is our own minds trying to reassure us that he does not know we are ahead of him and going toward our weapons.”

“But how do we both hear the same thing if he isn’t talking to us?”

“I don’t know. But I prefer it the way it is. I never did like easy answers.”

Then there came the evening they were within sight of their original valley, and, if they moved at full speed through the night, they should reach their campsite very soon after dawn.

“But the weariness is beginning to creep up through the narcosis,” said Brian. “Now I’m desiring the effect that we tried to avoid before.”

“But what has happened?”

“I believe that the narcotic period of the planet is over. The carnival is coming to an end.”

“Do you know something, Brian? We did not have to go around the world at all. At any time we could have separated and outmaneuvered him. He could not have intercepted both of us going toward the weapons pile if we went different ways. But we could not bear to part.”

“That is a woman’s explanation.”

“Well, let’s see you find another one. You didn’t want to be parted from me, did you, Brian?”

“No, I didn’t.”

It was a rough, short night, but it would be the last. They moved in the agony of a cosmic hangover.

“I’ve become addicted,” said Brian, “and the fruit has lost its numbing properties. I don’t see how it is possible for anyone to be so tired.”

“I’d carry you again if I weren’t collapsing myself.”

“Dammit, you couldn’t! You’re only a girl!”

“I am not only a girl! Nobody is only an anything. Our trouble here may have started with your thinking that Snuffles was only an animal; and he read your thoughts and was insulted.”

“He did not read my thoughts. He is only an animal. And I will shoot his fuzzy hide full of holes when we get to our campsite. Let’s keep on with it and not take any chances of his catching or passing us in the dark.”

“How could Phelan’s corollary apply to this planet and no other when he had never been here then?”

“Because, as I often suspected, Phelan had a touch of the joker in him and he composed it sardonically.”

“Then he made it for fun. And do you still think that Bellota was made for fun?”

“The fun has developed a grotesque side to it I am afraid I will have to put an end to a part of that fun. The dark is coming, and there is our campsite, and we are in the clear. I’ll make it before I drop if I have to bust a lung. There’s an elephant gun with a blaster attachment that I’ll take to that fur-coated phony. We’re going to have bear steak for breakfast.”

He achieved the campsite. He had reached the wobbly state, but he still ran. He was inside the circle and at the gun stack, when a roar like double thunder froze his ears and his entrails.

He leaped back, fell, rolled, crawled, snaked his way out of reach; and the sudden shock of it bewildered him.

And there was Snuffles sitting in the middle of the supply dump and smoking the pipe of Billy Cross.

And when the words rattled inside Brian’s head again, how could he be sure that it was hallucination and not the bear talking to him?

“You thought that I had forgotten that Bellota was round? If you knew how much trouble I had making it as round as it is, you would know that I could never forget it.”

Georgina came up, but fell to her knees in despair when she saw that Snuffles was there ahead of them. “I can’t run any more, Brian, and I know that you can’t. I am down and I can never get up again. How soon will they get here?”

“The Marines?”

“Yes, the ship.”

“Too late to help us. I used to wish they would be late just once. I am getting that wish, but it isn’t as amusing as I anticipated.”

Snuffles knocked out his pipe then, as a man would; and laid it carefully on a rock. Then he came out and killed them: Georgina, the friendly iceberg, and Brian, who did hate a pat ending.

And Snuffles was still king of Bellota.

The report of the ship read in part:

No explanation of the fact that no attempt seems to have been made to use the weapons, though two of the party were killed nearly a week later than the others. All were mangled by the huge pseudo-ursine which seems to have run amok from eating the local fruit, seasonally narcotic. Impossible to capture animal without unwarranted delay of takeoff time. Gravitational incongruity must await fuller classification of data.”

The next world that Snuffles made embodied certain improvements, and he did correct the gravity error but it still contained many elements of the grotesque. Perfection is a very long, very hard road.

## IN THE GARDEN

The protozoic recorder chirped like a bird. Not only would there be life traces on that little moon, but it would be a lively place. So they skipped several steps in the procedure.

The chordata discerner read Positive over most of the surface. There was spinal fluid on that orb, rivers of it. So again they omitted several tests and went to the cognition scanner. Would it show Thought on the body?

Naturally they did not get results at once, nor did they expect to; it required a fine adjustment. But they were disappointed that they found nothing for several hours as they hovered high over the rotation. Then it came, clearly and definitely, but from quite a small location only.

“Limited7” said Steiner, “as though within a pale. As follow the rest of the surface to find another, or concentrate though there were but one city, if that is its form. Shall we on this? It’ll be twelve hours before it’s back in our ken if we let it go now.

“Let’s lock on this one and finish the scan. Then we can do the rest of the world to make sure we’ve missed nothing,” said Stark.

There was one more test to run, one very tricky and difficult of analysis, that of the Extraordinary Perception Locator. This was designed simply to locate a source of superior thought. But this might be so varied or so unfamiliar that often both the machine and the designer of it were puzzled as how to read the results.

The E.P. Locator had been designed by Glaser. But when the Locator had refused to read Positive when turned on the inventor himself, bad blood developed between machine and man. Glaser knew that he had extraordinary perception. He was a much honored man in his field. He told the machine so heatedly.

The machine replied, with such warmth that its relays chattered, that Glaser did not have extraordinary perception; he had only ordinary perception to an extraordinary degree. There is a difference, the machine insisted.

It was for this reason that Glaser used that model no more, but built others more amenable. And it was for this reason also that the owners of Little Probe had acquired the original machine so cheaply.

And there was no denying that the Extraordinary Perception Locator

(or Eppel) was a contrary machine. On Earth it had read Positive on a number of crack-pots, including Waxey Sax, a jazz tootler who could not even read music. But it had also read Positive on ninety percent of the acknowledged superior minds of the Earth. In space it had been a sound guide to the unusual intelligences encountered. Yet on Suzuki-Mi it had read Positive on a two-inch long worm, one only out of billions. For the countless identical worms no trace of anything at all was shown by the test.

So it was with mixed emotions that Steiner locked onto the area and got a flick. He then narrowed to a smaller area (apparently one individual, though this could not be certain) and got very definite action. Eppel was busy. The machine had a touch of the ham in it, and assumed an air of importance when it ran these tests.

Finally it signaled the result, the most exasperating result it ever produces: the single orange light. It was the equivalent of the shrug of the shoulders in a man. They called it the it "You tell me light." So among the intelligences on that body there was at least one that might be extraordinary, though possibly in a crack-pot way. It is good to be forewarned. "Scan the remainder of the world, Steiner," said Stark, "and the rest of us will get some sleep. If you find no other spot then we will go down on that one the next time it is in position un(]er us, in about twelve hours." "You don't want to visit any of the other areas first? Somewhere away from the thoughtful creature?" "No. The rest of the world may be dangerous. There must be a reason that Thought is in one spot only. If we find no others then we will go down boldly and visit this." So they all, except Steiner, went off to their bunks then: Stark, the captain; Caspar Craig, supercargo, tycoon and fifty-one percent owner of the Little Probe; Gregory Gilbert, the executive officer; and F. R. Briton, S. J., a Jesuit priest who was linguist and checker champion of the craft.

Dawn did not come to the moon-town. The Little Probe hovered stationary in the light and the moon-town came up under the dawn. Then the Probe went down to visit whatever was there.

"There's no town," said Steiner. "Not a building. Yet we're on the track of the minds. There's nothing but a meadow and some boscage, a sort of fountain or pool, and four streams booming out of it."

"Keep on toward the minds," said Stark. "They're our target."

"Not a building, not two sticks or stones placed together. It looks like

an Earth-type sheep there. And that looks like an Earth-lion, I'm almost afraid to say it. And those two — why they could be Earth-people. But with a difference. Where is that bright light coming from?"

"I don't know, but they're right in the middle of it. Land here. We'll go to meet them at once. Timidity has never been an efficacious tool with us."

Well, they were people. And one could only wish that all people were like them. There was a man and a woman, and they were clothed either in very bright garments or no garments at all, but only in a very bright light.

"Talk to them, Father Briton," said Stark. "You are the linguist."

"Howdy," said the priest.

He may or may not have been understood, but the two of them smiled at him so he went on.

"Father Briton from Philadelphia," he said, "on detached service. And you, my good man, what is your handle, your monicker, your tag?"

"Ha-Adamah," said the man.

"And your daughter, or niece?"

It may be that the shining man frowned momentarily at this; but the woman smiled, proving that she was human.

"The woman is named Hawwah," said the man. "The sheep is named sheep, the lion is named lion, the horse is named horse, and the hoolock is named hoolock."

"I understand. It is possible that this could go on and on. How is it that you use the English tongue?"

"I have only one tongue; but it is given to us to be understood by all; by the eagle, by the squirrel, by the ass, by the English."

"We happen to be bloody Yankees, but we use a borrowed tongue. You wouldn't have a drink on you for a tubful of thirsty travelers, would you?"

"The fountain."

"Ah — I see."

But the crew all drank of the fountain to be sociable. It was water, but water that excelled, cool and with all its origina bubbles like the first water ever made.

"What do you make of them?" asked Stark.

"Human," said Steiner. "It may even be that they are a little more than human. I don't understand that light that surrounds them. And they seem to be clothed, as it were, in dignity."

“And very little else,” said Father Briton, “though that light trick does serve a purpose. But I’m not sure they’d pass in Philadelphia.” “Talk to them again,” said Stark. “You’re the linguist.” “That isn’t necessary here, Captain. Talk to them yourself.” “Are there any other people here?” Stark asked the man. “The two of us. Man and woman.”

“But are there any others?”

“How would there be any others? What other kind of people could there be than man and woman?”

“But is there more than one man or woman?”

“How could there be more than one of anything?” The captain was a little puzzled by this, but he went on doggedly: “Ha-Adamah, what do you think that we are? Are we not people?”

“You are not anything till I name you. But I will name you and then you can be. You are named captain. He is named priest. He is named engineer. He is named flunky.”

“Thanks a lot,” said Steiner.

“But are we not people?” persisted Captain Stark.

“No. We are the people. There are no people but two. How could there be other people?”

“And the damndest thing about it,” muttered Steiner, “is how are we going to prove him wrong? But it does give you a small feeling.”

“Can we have something to eat?” asked the captain.

“Pick from the trees,” said Ha-Adamah, “and then it may be that you will want to sleep on the grass. Being not of human nature (which does not need sleep or rest), it may be that you require respite. But you are free to enjoy the garden and its fruits.”

“We will,” said Captain Stark.

They wandered about the place, but they were uneasy.

There were the animals. The lion and lioness were enough to make one cautious, though they offered no harm. The two bears had a puzzling look, as though they wanted either to frolic with you or to mangle you.

“If there are only two people here,” said Caspar Craig, “then it may be that the rest of the world is not dangerous at all. It looked fertile wherever we scanned it, though not so fertile as this central bit. And those rocks will bear examining.”

“Flecked with gold, and possibly with something else,” said Stark. “A very promising site.”

“And everything grows here,” added Stark. “Those are Earth-fruits and I never saw finer. I’ve tasted the grapes and plums and pears. The figs and dates are superb, the quince is as flavorsome as a quince can be, the cherries are excellent. And I never did taste such oranges. But I haven’t yet tried the-” and he stopped.

“If you’re thinking what I’m afraid to think,” said Gilbert, “then it will be a test at least: whether we’re having a pleasant dream or whether this is reality. Go ahead and eat one.

“I won’t be the first to eat one. You eat.”

“Ask him first. You ask him.”

“Ha-Adamah, is it allowed to eat the apples?”

“Certainly. Eat. It is the finest fruit in the garden.”

“Well, the analogy breaks down there,” said Stark. “I was almost beginning to believe in the thing. But, if it isn’t that, then what? Father Briton, you are the linguist, but in Hebrew does not Ha-Adamah and Hawwah mean —?”

“Of course they do. You know that as well as I.”

“I was never a believer. But would it be possible for the exact same proposition to maintain here as on Earth?”

“All things are possible.”

And it was then that Ha-Adamah, the shining man, gave a wild cry: “No. No. Do not approach it. It is not allowed to eat of that one.”

It was the pomegranate tree, and he was warning Craig away from it.

“Once more, Father,” said Stark, “you should be the authority; but does not the idea that it was an apple that was forbidden go back only to a medieval painting?”

“It does. The name of the fruit is not mentioned in Genesis. In Hebrew exegesis, however, the pomegranate is usually indicated.”

“I thought so. Question the man further, Father. This is too incredible.”

“It is a little odd. Adam, old man, how long have you been here?”

“Forever less six days is the answer that has been given to me. I never did understand the answer, however.”

“And have you gotten no older in all that time?”

“I do not understand what ‘older’ is. I am as I have been from the beginning.”

“And do you think that you will ever die?”



“To die I do not understand. I am taught that it is a property of fallen nature to die, and that does not pertain to me or mine.”

“And are you happy here?”

“Perfectly happy according to my preternatural state. But I am taught that it might be possible to lose that happiness, and then to seek it vainly through all the ages. I am taught that sickness and aging and even death could come if this happiness were ever lost. I am taught that on at least one other unfortunate world it has actually been lost.”

“Do you consider yourself a knowledgeable man?”

“Yes, since I am the only man, and knowledge is natural to man. But I am further blessed. I have a preternatural intellect.”

Then Stark cut in once more: “There must be some one question you could ask him, Father. Some way to settle it. I am becoming nearly convinced.”

“Yes, there is a question that will settle it. Adam, old man, how about a game of checkers?”

“This is hardly the time for clowning,” said Stark.

“I’m not clowning, Captain. How about it, Adam? I’ll give you choice of colors and first move.”

“No. It would be no contest. I have a preternatural intellect.”

“Well, I beat a barber who was champion of Germantown. And I beat the champion of Morgan County, Tennessee, which is the hottest checker center on Earth. I’ve played against, and beaten, machines. But I never played a preternatural mind. Let’s just set up the board, Adam, and have a go at it.”

“No. It would be no contest. I would not like to humble you.”

They were there for three days. They were delighted with the place. It was a world with everything, and it seemed to have only two inhabitants. They went everywhere except into the big cave.

“What is there, Adam?” asked Captain Stark.

“The great serpent lives there. I would not disturb him. He has long been cranky because plans that he had for us did not materialize. But we are taught that should evil ever come to us, which it cannot if we persevere, it will come by him.”

They learned no more of the real nature of the sphere in their time there. Yet all but one of them were convinced of the reality when they left. And they talked of it as they took off.

“A crowd would laugh if told of it,” said Stark, “but not many would laugh if they had actually seen the place, or them. I am not a gullible man, but I am convinced of this: this is a pristine and pure world and ours and all the others we have visited are fallen worlds. Here are the prototypes of our first parents before their fall. They are garbed in light and innocence, and they have the happiness that we have been seeking for centuries. It would be a crime if anyone disturbed that happiness.”

“I too am convinced,” said Steiner. “It is Paradise itself, where the lion lies down with the lamb, and where the serpent has not prevailed. It would be the darkest of crimes if we or others should play the part of the serpent, and intrude and spoil.”

“I am probably the most skeptical man in the world “ said Caspar Craig the tycoon, “but I do believe my eyes. I have been there and seen it. It is indeed an unspoiled Paradise; and it would be a crime calling to the wide heavens for vengeance for anyone to smirch in any way that perfection.”

“So much for that. Now to business. Gilbert, take a gram: Ninety Million Square Miles of Pristine Paradise for sale or lease. Farming, Ranching, exceptional opportunities for Horticulture. Gold, Silver, Iron, Earth-Type Fauna. Terms. Special rates for Large Settlement Parties. Write, gram, or call in person at any of our planetary offices as listed below. Ask for Brochure-Eden Acres Unlimited.”

Down in the great cave that Old Serpent, a two-legged one among whose names was “Snake-Oil Sam,” spoke to his underlings: “It’ll take them fourteen days to get back with the settlers. We’ll have time to overhaul the blasters. We haven’t had any well-equipped settlers for six weeks. It used to be we’d hardly have time to strip and slaughter and stow before there was another hatch to take care of.”

“I think you’d better write me some new lines,” said Adam. “I feel like a goof saying those same ones to each bunch.”

“You are a goof, and therefore perfect for the part. I was in show business long enough to learn never to change a line too soon. I did change Adam and Eve to Ha-Adamah and Hawwah, and the apple to the pomegranate. People aren’t becoming any smarter — but they are becoming better researched, and they insist on authenticity.

“This is still a perfect come-on here. There is something in human nature that cannot resist the idea of a Perfect Paradise. Folks will whoop

and holler to their neighbors to come in droves to spoil it and mar it. It isn't greed or the desire for new land so much, though that is strong too. Mainly it is the feverish passion to befoul and poison what is unspoiled. Fortunately I am sagacious enough to take advantage of this trait. And when you start to farm a new world on a shoestring you have to acquire your equipment as you can."

He looked proudly around at the great cave with its mountains and tiers of material; heavy machinery of all sorts, titanic crates of foodstuff space-sealed; wheeled, tracked, propped, vanned, and jetted vehicles; and power packs to run a world.

He looked at the three dozen space ships stripped and stacked, and at the rather large pile of bone-meal in one corner.

"We will have to get another lion," said Eve. "Bowser is getting old, and Marie-Yvette abuses him and gnaws his toes. And we do have to have a big-maned lion to lie down with the lamb."

"I know it, Eve. The lion is a very important prop. Maybe one of the crack-pot settlers will bring a new lion."

"And can't you mix another kind of shining paint?" asked Adam. "This itches. It's hell."

"I'm working on it."

Caspar Craig was still dictating the gram: "Amazing quality of longevity seemingly inherent in the locale. Climate Ideal. Daylight or half-light all twenty-one hours from Planet Delphina and from Sol Caspar Craig Number Three. Pure water for all industrial purposes. Scenic and Storied. Zoning and pre-settlement restrictions to insure congenial neighbors. A completely planned globular settlement in a near arm of our own galaxy. Low taxes and liberal credit. Financing our specialty —"

"And you had better have an armed escort when you return," said Father Briton.

"Why in cosmos would we want an armed escort?"

"It's as phoney as a seven-credit note."

"You, a man of the cloth, doubt it? And us ready skeptics convinced by our senses? Why do you doubt?"

"It is only the unbelieving who believe so easily in obvious frauds. Theologically unsound, dramaturgically weak, philologically impossible, zoologically rigged, salted conspicuously with gold, and shot through with anachronisms. And moreover he was afraid to play me at checkers."

“What?”

“If I had a preternatural intellect I wouldn’t be afraid of a game of checkers with anyone. Yet there was an unusual mind there somewhere; it is just that he chose not to make our acquaintance personally.”

They looked at the priest thoughtfully.

“But it was Paradise in one way,” said Steiner.

“How?”

“All the time we were there the woman did not speak.”

## ALL THE PEOPLE

Anthony Trotz went first to the politician, Mike Delado.

“How many people do you know, Mr. Delado?”

“Why the question?”

“I am wondering just what amount of detail the mind can hold.”

“To a degree I know many. Ten thousand well, thirty thousand by name, probably a hundred thousand by face and to shake hands with.”

“And what is the limit?”

“Possibly I am the limit.” The politician smiled frostily. “The only limit is time, speed of cognizance, and retention. I am told that the latter lessens with age. I am seventy, and it has not done so with me. Whom I have known I do not forget.”

“And with special training could one go beyond you?”

“I doubt if one could — much. For my own training has been quite special. Nobody has been so entirely with the people as I have. I’ve taken five memory courses in my time, but the tricks of all of them I had already come to on my own. I am a great believer in the commonality of mankind and of near equal inherent ability. Yet there are some, say the one man in fifty, who in degree if not in kind does exceed his fellows in scope and awareness and vitality. I am that one man in fifty, and knowing people is my specialty.”

“Could a man who specialized still more — and to the exclusion of other things — know a hundred thousand men well?”

“It is possible. Dimly.”

“A quarter of a million?”

“I think not. He might learn that many faces and names, but he would not know the men.”

Anthony went next to the philosopher, Gabriel Mindel.

“Mr. Mindel, how many people do you know?”

“How know? Per se? A Se? Or In se? Per suam essentiam, perhaps? Or do you mean ab alio? Or to know as hoc aiquid? There is a fine difference there. Or do you possibly mean to know in subsiantia prima, or in the sense of comprehensive noumena?”

“Somewhere between the latter two. How many persons do you know by name, face, and with a degree of intimacy?”

“I have learned over the years the names of some of my colleagues,

possibly a dozen of them. I am now sound on my wife's name, and I seldom stumble over the names of my offspring — never more than momentarily. But you may have come to the wrong man for... whatever you have come for. I am notoriously poor at names, faces, and persons. I have even been described (*vox faucibus haesit*) as absentminded."

"Yes, you do have the reputation. But perhaps I have not come to the wrong man in seeking the theory of the thing. What is it that limits the comprehensive capacity of the mind of man? What will it hold? What restricts?"

"The body."

"How is that?"

"The brain, I should say, the material tie. The mind is limited by the brain. It is skull-bound. It can accumulate no more than its cranial capacity, though not one-tenth of that is ordinarily used. An unbodied mind would (in esoteric theory) be unlimited."

"And how in practical theory?"

"If it is practical, a pragma, it is a thing and not a theory."

"Then we can have no experience with the unbodied mind, or the possibility of it?"

"We have not discovered any area of contact, but we may entertain the possibility of it. There is no paradox here. One may rationally consider the irrational."

Anthony went next to see the priest.

"How many people do you know?" he asked him.

"I know them all."

"That has to be doubted," said Anthony after a moment.

"I've had twenty different stations. And when you hear five thousand confessions a year for forty years, you by no means know all about people, but you do know all people."

"I do not mean types. I mean persons."

"Oh, I know a dozen or so well, a few thousands somewhat less."

"Would it be possible to know a hundred thousand people, a half million?"

"A mentalist might know that many to recognize; I don't know the limit. But darkened man has a limit set; on everything."

"Could a somehow emancipated man know more?"

"The only emancipated man is the corporally dead man. And the dead

man, if he attains the beatific vision, knows all other persons who have ever been since time began.”

“All the billions?”

“All.”

“With the same brain?”

“No. But with the same mind.”

“Then wouldn’t even a believer have to admit that the mind which we have now is only a token mind? Would not any connection it would have with a completely comprehensive mind be very tenuous? Would we really be the same person if so changed? It is like saying a bucket would hold the ocean if it were fulfilled, which only means filled full. How could it be the same mind?”

“I don’t know.”

Anthony went to see the psychologist.

“How many people do you know, Dr. Shirm?”

“I could be crabby and say that I know as many as want to; but it wouldn’t be the truth. I rather like people, which is odd in my profession. What is it that you really want to know?”

“How many people can one man know?”

“It doesn’t matter very much. People mostly overestimate the number of their acquaintances. What is it that you are trying to ask me?”

“Could one man know everyone?”

“Naturally not. But unnaturally he might seem to. There is a delusion to this effect accompanied by euphoria, and it is called —”

“I don’t want to know what it is called. Why do specialists use Latin and Greek?”

“One part hokum, and two parts need; there simply not being enough letters in the alphabet of exposition without them. It is as difficult to name concepts as children, and we search our brains as a new mother does. It will not do to call two children or two concepts by the same name.”

“Thank you. I doubt that this is delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria.”

Anthony had a reason for questioning the four men since (as a new thing that had come to him) he knew everybody. He knew everyone in Salt Lake City, where he had never been. He knew everybody in Jebel Shah, where the town is a little amphitheater around the harbor, and in

Batangas and Weilmi. He knew the loungers around the end of the Galata bridge in Istanbul, and the porters in Kuala Lumpur. He knew the tobacco traders in Plovdiv, and the cork cutters of Portugal. He knew the dock workemen in Djibouti, and the glove makers in Prague. He knew the vegetable farmers around El Centro, and the muskrat trappers of Barrataria Bay. He knew the three billion people of the world by name and face, and with a fair degree of intimacy.

“Yet I’m not a very intelligent man. I’ve been called a bungler. And they’ve had to reassign me three different times at the filter center. I’ve seen only a few thousands of those billions of people, and it seems unusual that I should know them all. It may be a delusion, as Dr. Shirm says, but it is a heavily detailed delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria. I feel like green hell just thinking of it.”

He knew the cattle traders of Letterkenny Donegal; he knew the cane cutters of Oriente, and the tree climbers of Milne Bay. He knew the people who died every minute, and those who were born.

“There is no way out of it. I know everybody in the world. It is impossible, but it is so. And to what purpose? There aren’t a handful of them I could borrow a dollar from, and I haven’t a real friend in the lot. I don’t know whether it came to me suddenly, but I realized it suddenly. My father was a junk dealer in Wichita, and my education is spotty. I am maladjusted, introverted, incompetent and unhappy, and I also have weak kidneys. Why should a power like this come to a man like me?”

The children in the streets hooted at him. Anthony had always had a healthy hatred for children and dogs, those twin harassers of the unfortunate and the maladjusted. Both run in packs, and both are cowardly attackers. If either of them spots a weakness he will not let it go. That Anthony’s father had been a junk dealer was no reason to hoot at him. And how did the children even know about that? Did they possess some fraction of the power that had come on him lately?

But he had strolled about the town for too long. He should have been at work at the filter center. Often they were impatient with him when he wandered off from his work, and Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him when he came in now.

“Where have you been, Anthony?”

“Walking. I talked to four men. I mentioned no subject in the province of the filter center.”



“Every subject is in the province of the filter center. And you know that our work here is confidential.”

“Yes, sir, but I do not understand the import of my work here. I would not be able to give out information that I do not have.”

“A popular misconception. There are others who might understand the import of it, and be able to reconstruct it from what you tell them. How do you feel?”

“Nervous, unwell, my tongue is furred, and my kidneys —”

“Ah yes, there will be someone here this afternoon to fix your kidneys. I have not forgotten. Is there anything that you want to tell me?”

“No, sir.”

Colonel Cooper had the habit of asking that of his workers in the manner of a mother asking a child if he wants to go to the bathroom. There was something embarrassing in his intonation.

Well, he did want to tell him something, but he didn't know how to phrase it. He wanted to tell the colonel that he had newly acquired the power of knowing everyone in the world, that he was worried how he could hold so much in a head that was not noteworthy in its capacity. But he feared ridicule more than he feared anything and he was a tangle of fears.

But he thought he would try it a little bit on his co-workers.

“I know a man named Walter Walloroy in Galveston,” he said to Adrian. “He drinks beer at the Gizmo bar, and is retired.”

“What is the superlative of so what?”

“But I have never been there,” said Anthony.

“And I have never been in Kalamazoo.”

“I know a girl in Kalamazoo. Her name is Greta Harandash. She is home today with a cold. She is prone to colds.”

But Adrian was a creature both uninterested and uninteresting. It is very hard to confide in one who is uninterested.

“Well, I will live with it a little while,” said Anthony. “Or I may have to go to a doctor and see if he can give me something to make all these people go away. But if he thinks my story is a queer one, he may report me back to the center, and I might be reclassified again. It makes me nervous to be reclassified.”

So he lived with it a while, the rest of the day and the night. He should have felt better. A man had come that afternoon and fixed his kidneys;

but there was nobody to fix his nervousness and apprehension. And his skittishness was increased when the children hooted at him as he walked to work in the morning. That hated epithet! But how could they know that his father had been a dealer in used metals in a town far away?

He had to confide in someone.

He spoke to Wellington; who also worked in his room. "I know a girl in Beirut who is just going to bed. It is evening there now, you know."

"That so? Why don't they get their time straightened out? I met a girl last night that's cute as a correlator key, and kind of shaped like one. She doesn't know yet that I work in the center and am a restricted person. I'm not going to tell her. Let her find out for herself."

It was no good trying to tell things to Wellington. Wellington never listened. And then Anthony got a summons to Colonel Peter Cooper, which always increased his apprehension.

"Anthony," said the colonel, "I want you to tell me if you discern anything unusual. That is really your job, to report anything unusual. The other, the paper shuffling, is just something to keep your idle hands busy. Now tell me clearly if anything unusual has come to your notice."

"Sir, it has." And then he blurted it out. "I know everybody. I know everybody in the world. I know them all in their billions, every person. It has me worried sick."

"Yes, yes, Anthony. But tell me, have you noticed anything odd? It is your duty to tell me if you have."

"But I have just told you! In some manner I know every person in the world. I know the people in Transvaal, I know the people in Guatemala. I know every body."

"Yes, Anthony, we realize that. And it may take a little getting used to. But that isn't what I mean. Have you, besides that thing that seems out of the way to you, noticed anything unusual, anything that seems out of place, a little bit wrong?"

"Ah, besides that and your reaction to it, no, sir. Nothing else odd. I might ask, though, how odd can a thing get? But other than that, no, sir."

"Good, Anthony. Now remember, if you sense anything odd about anything at all, come and tell me. No matter how trivial it is, if you feel that something is just a little bit out of place, then report it at once. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

But he couldn't help wondering what it might be that the Colonel would consider a little bit odd.

Anthony left the center and walked. He shouldn't have. He knew that they became impatient with him when he wandered off from his work.

"But I have to think. I have all the people in the world in my brain, and still I am not able to think. This power should have come to someone able to take advantage of it."

He went into the Plugged Nickel Bar, but the man on duty knew him for a restricted person from the filter center, and would not serve him.

He wandered disconsolately about the city. "I know the people in Omaha and those in Omsk. What queer names have the towns of the earth! I know everyone in the world, and when anyone is born or dies. And Colonel Cooper did not find it unusual. Yet I am to be on the lookout for things unusual. The question rises, would I know an odd thing if I met it?"

And then it was that something just a little bit unusual did happen, something not quite right, a small thing. But the Colonel had told him to report anything about anything, no matter how insignificant, that struck him as a little queer.

It was just that with all the people in his head, and the arrivals and departures, there was a small group that was not of the pattern. Every minute hundreds left by death and arrived by birth. And now there was a small group, seven persons; they arrived into the world, and they were not horn into the world.

So Anthony went to tell Colonel Cooper that something had occurred to his mind that was a little bit odd.

But damn-the-dander-headed-two-and-four-legged devils, there were the kids and the dogs in the street again, yipping and hooting and chanting:

"Tony the tin man, Tony the tin man."

He longed for the day when he would see them fall like leaves out of his mind, and death take them.

"Tony the tin man. Tony the tin man."

How had they known that his father was a used metal dealer?

Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him.

"You surely took your time, Anthony. Tell me at once what it is and where. The reaction was registered, but it would take us hours to pinpoint

its source without your help. Now then, explain as calmly as you can what you felt or experienced. Or, more to the point, where are they?"

"No. You will have to answer certain questions first."

"I haven't the time to waste, Anthony. Tell me once what it is and where."

"No. There is no other way. You have to bargain with me."

"One does not bargain with restricted persons."

"Well, I will bargain till I find out just what it means that I am a restricted person."

"You really don't know? Well, we haven't time to fix that stubborn streak in you now. Quickly, just what is that you have to know?"

"I have to know what a restricted person is. I have to know why the children hoot 'Tony the tin man' at me. How can they know that my father was a junk dealer?"

"You had no father. We give to each of you a basic collection of concepts and the vocabulary to handle them, a sufficient store of memories, and a background of a distant town. That happened to be yours, but there is no connection here. The children call you Tony the Tin Man because, like all really cruel creatures, they have an instinct for the truth that can hurt; and they will never forget it."

"Then I am a tin man?"

"Well, no. Actually only seventeen percent metal. And less than a third of one percent tin. You are compounded of animal, vegetable, and mineral fiber, and here was much effort given to your manufacture and programming. Yet the taunt of the children is essentially true."

"Then, if I am Tony the Tin Man, how can I know all the people of the world in my mind?"

"You have no mind."

"In my brain then. How can all that be in one small brain?"

"Because your brain is not in your head, and it is not small. The longest way around may take the shortest time here. Come, I may as well show it to you. I've told you enough that it won't matter if you know a little more. There are few who are taken on personally conducted sightseeing tours of their own brains. You should be grateful."

"Gratitude seems a little tardy."

They went into the barred area, down into the bowels of the main building of the center. And they looked at the brain of Anthony Trotz, a

restricted person in its special meaning.

“It is the largest in the world,” said Colonel Cooper.

“How large?”

“A little over twelve hundred cubic meters.”

“What a brain! And it is mine?”

“You share it with others. But, yes, it is yours. You have access to its data. You are an adjunct to it, a runner for it, an appendage, inasmuch as you are anything at all.”

“Colonel Cooper, how long have I been alive?”

“You are not.”

“How long have I been as I am now?”

“It is three days since you were last reassigned, since you were assigned to this. At that time your nervousness and apprehensions were introduced. An apprehensive unit will be more inclined to notice details just little out of the ordinary.”

“And what is my purpose?”

They were now walking back to the office work area, and Anthony had a sad feeling at leaving his brain behind him.

“This is a filter center,” said Colonel Cooper, “and your purpose is to serve as a filter, of a sort. Every person has a slight aura about him. It is a characteristic of his, and is part of his personality and purpose. And it can be detected, electrically, magnetically, even visually under special conditions. The accumulator at which we were looking (your brain) is designed to maintain contact with all the auras in the world, and to keep running and complete data on them all. It contains a multiplicity of circuits for each of its three billion and some subjects. However, as aid to its operation, it was necessary to assign several artificial consciousnesses to it. You are one of these.”

Anthony looked out the window as the Colonel continued his explanation.

The dogs and the children had found a new victim in the streets below, and Anthony’s heart went out to him.

“The purpose,” said Colonel Cooper, “was to notice anything just a little peculiar in the auras and the persons they represent, anything at all odd in their comings and goings. Anything like what you have come here to report to me.”

“Like the seven persons who recently arrived in the world, and not by

way of birth?”

“Yes. We have been expecting the first of the aliens for months. We must know their area, and at once. Now tell me.”

“What if they are not aliens at all? What if they are restricted persons like myself?”

“Restricted persons have no aura, are not persons, are not alive. And you would not receive knowledge of them.”

“Then how do I know the other restricted persons here, Adrian and Wellington, and such?”

“You know them at first hand. You do not know them through the machine. Now tell me the area quickly. The center may be a primary target. It will take the machine hours to ravel it out. Your only purpose is to serve as an intuitive shortcut.”

But Tin Man Tony did not speak. He only thought in his mind — more accurately, in his brain a hundred yards away. He thought in his fabricated consciousness:

The area is quite near. If the Colonel were not burdened with a mind, he would be able to think more clearly. He would know that cruel children and dogs love to worry what is not human, and that all the restricted persons for this area are accounted for. He would know that they are worrying one of the aliens in the street below, and that is the area that is right for my consciousness.

I wonder if they will be better manners? He is an imposing figure, and he would be able to pass for a man. And the Colonel is right: the center is a primary target.

Why! I never knew you could kill a child just by pointing a finger at him like that! What opportunities I have missed! Enemy of my enemy, you are my friend.

And aloud he said to the Colonel:

“I will not tell you.”

“Then we’ll have you apart and get it out of you mighty quick.”

“How quick?”

“Ten minutes.”

“Time enough,” said Tony.

For he knew them now, coming in like snow. They were arriving in the world by the hundreds, and not arriving by birth.

## NAME OF THE SNAKE

When Pio Quindecimo — Confiteantur Domino Misericordia ejus — had proclaimed it, it was received, even by the faithful, with a measure of ennui. Contingent, speculative, rhetorical — it was not thought of as touching on practicality. Pio was not one of the outstanding Popes The century.

The encyclical was titled modestly “Euntes Ergo DoCete Omnes”: “Going therefore Teach Ye All.” Its substance was that this was a literal command of the Lord, and that the time had come to implement that command in its extreme meaning; that when the Lord had said “Go into all lands,” He had not meant to go into lands of one narrow earth only; that when the Lord had said “Teach Ye All,” it was not meant to teach all men only... within the narrow,, framework in which we have considered the term “men.”

Should the command be taken literally, its implementation would cause far-reaching activity. It was in the implementation of the command that Padreco Barnaby was now on that remote planet, Analos.

Could one call the Anabi humans? Had their skeletal remains been discovered on old Earth, they would unhesitatingly have been classed as human. The oddly formed ears — not really as large as they seemed — somewhat Gothic in their steeped upsweep, their slight caudal appendage, their remarkable facial mobility and chameleon-like complexions, these could not have been read from their bone remains. But how are we to say that their ears were more grotesque than our own? When did you last look at your own ears objectively? Are they not odd things to be sticking on the sides of a person’s head?

“They are gargoyles,” said an early visitor from Earth. Of course they were. The gargoyles had been copied by a still earlier visitor to Analos from Earth. But they were a lively and interesting bunch of gargoyles: mechanically civilized, ethically weird, artistically exciting. They were polished and polyglot, and in many ways more human than the humans.

On Analos, the Padreco was at first a guest of Landmaster, a leading citizen. Here the priest, speaking of his mission, first came up against the Wall.

“I can see what this might lead to, little priest,” Land-master told him when they discussed the situation. “It might even become bothersome to

us — if we ever let anything bother us — if we had not passed beyond the stage where annoyance was possible. So long as you confined your activity to resident Earthlings and humans or that recension, there was no problem. Fortunately we do not fall within those categories. That being so, I do not see how your present aspirations can have any point of contact with us.”

“You Anabi are sentient creatures of great natural intelligence, Landmaster. As such it is even possible that you have souls.”

“We have souls that are fully realized. What could humans give to us who transcend humanity?”

“The Truth, the Way, the Life, the Baptism.”

“We have the first three greatly beyond yourselves. The last — the crabbed rite of a dying sect — what could that give us?”

“Forgiveness of your sins.”

“But we haven’t any sins. That’s the whole point about us. We’ve long since passed beyond that. You humans are still awkward and guilt-ridden. You are of a species which as yet has no adult form. Vicariously we may be the adult form of yourselves. The idea of sin is an aspect of your early awkwardness.”

“Everybody has sins, Landmaster.”

“Only according to your own childish thesis, little priest. And consequent to that, you would reason that everybody must be saved-and by yourselves, a race of crop-eared, flat-faced children.

“But consider how meaningless it becomes in relation to ourselves, the Ananoi. How could we sin? What would we have to sin about? Our procreation no longer follows the grotesque pattern of your own, and ours is without passion. You can see that ninety percent of your sin is already gone.

“What else is left to us? What other opportunity — if that is the word for it — have we for sinning? We have no poverty, no greed, no envy. Our metabolism is so regulated that neither sloth nor hysterical activity is possible. We have long ago attained a balance in all things; and ‘sin’ is only a form of unbalance.

“I have forgotten, little priest. What are the ‘5ins’ of the childish races?”

“Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth,” said Padreco Barnaby. “These are the capital sins and the sources of sin. All others



derive from them.”

“Spoken like a valiant little mime. And nothing is derived but from a source. But you can see how completely we lack these seven stumbling blocks of children. Pride is only a misunderstanding of the nature of achievement; covetousness disappears when all that could be coveted has been acquired; lust is an adjunct of an arrangement that no longer has a counterpart in ourselves. Anger, gluttony, envy, sloth are only malfunctions. All malfunctions are subject to adjustment and correction, and we have corrected them.”

Padreco Barnaby was defeated for the while, and he let his mind wander. He gazed over the countryside of Analos.

An early explorer has given his impression of that world:

“It was as though I were walking under water,” he wrote. “This was not from any obstruction or resistance, for the atmosphere is lighter than Earth’s. It was from a sort of shimmering and wavering of the air itself and from the ‘air shadows,’ not clouds, that pass along like the running shadows of overhead waves. This, coupled with the flora (very like the underwater plants of Earth, though free-standing) gave me the feeling that I was walking on the bottom of the ocean.

To the Padreco it seemed as though he had been talking under water and that he had not been heard.

“What is the meaning of that giant kettle in the center of your main plaza, Landmaster?” he finally asked. “It seems quite old.”

“It is a relic of our old race, and we keep it. We have a certain reverence for the past — even the obsoleted past In minds as great as ours there is room even for relics.”

“Then it has no present use?”

“No. But under a special condition we could revert to an ancient use of it. That need not concern you now.”

A kettle, a giant kettle! You have no idea how grotesquely pot-bellied the thing was!

But the Padreco returned impotently to his main theme.

“There has to be sin, Landmaster! How else can there be salvation?”

“We have salvation, little priest You haven’t How could you bring it to us?”

So Padreco Barnaby left Landmaster and went out to see if he could not discover sin somewhere on Analos. He asked a small boy about it.

“Sonny, do you know what sin is? Have you ever run across the thing?”

“Sir and stranger, sin is an archaic word for an outmoded thing. It is an appurtenance to an unclarified state of mind that still obtains on the more benighted worlds. The word and the concept behind it will pass into oblivion as soon as true light can be brought into those dark places.”

Damnation! — a meaningless word on Analos: even the children of the gargoyles were too polite to be human.

“You little monster, do all the children on Analos talk like that?”

“All who are not deviationists would of necessity talk as I do. And ‘monster,’ as you call me with disapprobation, means a ‘show-piece,’ that which is displayed, a wonder. The late meaning of the word in the sense of a grotesque animal is an accretion. I gladly accept the name of monster in its true meaning. We are the Monsters of the Universe.”

“Damme, I believe that you are,” the Padreco said to himself. Polygot little prig! He couldn’t even cope with the children of the things.

“Sonny, do you ever have any fun?” he finally asked.

“Fun is another archaic word; but I am not sound on its meaning,” said the boy. “Is it not related to the obsolete concept of sin?”

“Not directly, boy. Fun is the third side of a two-headed coin. It slips in. Or it used to.”

“Sir and stranger, it is possible that you should take course in corrective semantics.”

“I may be taking one now. But what of the children are deviationists? Where are they? And what are like?”

“I don’t know. If they don’t pass their probationary period, we don’t see them any more. I believe they are sent to another place.”

“I have to find a little bit of sin somewhere,” the Padreco mumbled to himself. “An honest man should be able to find it anywhere if he really inquires. On Earth the saying was that a taxi-driver would always know where to find it.”

The Padreco hailed a taxi. A taxi is a circle. That is to say that one clammers over and sits in the single circular seat that faces inward. The Analoi are gregarious and like to gaze on the faces of their fellows. Only the shame-capable humans would wish to sit in Unfacing rows. The driver sits above in an open turret, and dangles his head down to talk.

“Where would you go, stranger?” the driver asked the Padreco. There

was one other passenger, a thoughtful man of early middle age.

“I’m looking for sin,” the Padreco told the driver. “It’s a tradition that taxi-drivers always know where to find it.”

“Riddles is it, stranger? Let me deliver my other customer while I puzzle this one out. It’s his last ride and that makes it important.”

“How is it your last ride?” Padreco Barnaby asked the thoughtful man. Conversation was unavoidable in such a taxi. The facing was too direct to get out of it.

“Oh, my time has come,” said the man, “a little earlier than with most. I’ve drunk the cup empty, so there’s nothing left. It was a nice life — well, I suppose it was. Rather expected more out of it, but I see now that I shouldn’t have. An adult will know when it’s over. And they do make a clean end of it for you.”

“Deus meus; is that the way it ends on Analos?”

“How else? Natural death has been pushed back so far that nobody could contemplate waiting for it. Should we drag out our lives and become abridged repetitious creatures like those of the lesser races? One goes quietly when he realizes that he has covered it all.”

“But that is despair!”

“A little boy’s word for a little boy’s thing. Termination with dignity — that’s the only way. Goodbye to you both. And to all.”

The thoughtful man got out and entered the Terminators.

“Now what was the name of that thing you wanted to be taken to, stranger?” the taxi-driver asked the Padreco.

“Never mind. I may have found it already. I’ll walk back.”

There was something here that needed a name.

He walked till he came to the buildings of the city again, and the buildings distorted as he neared them. The edifices of Analos seem bulbous at near view, and indeed they are built slightly so. Yet when seen at a distance, due to a vagary of atmosphere called Towering by Earth meteorologists, they appear normal and straight. The few buildings built to Earth specifications seemed pinched-in when viewed from afar, almost collapsing on themselves. But to the Padreco, the pot-bellied buildings of Analos made him feel a complete alien. He was lost in this world, and he cried out:

“Oh, for the old familiar sins that one can get hold of and denounce! In my book, Termination is not the only way, and Dignity has another

meaning. Where are the people who sin like people? Is there nowhere a healthy case of d.t.s or a hoppy in need of reform? Is &ere no burglar I can call my brother? No golden-hearted chippy who needs only be shown the right way? Is there no thief or usurer or politician to strike a note of reality? Hypocrites, wife-beaters, seducers, d8magogues, sleazy old perverters, where can I find you? Answer me! I need you now!”

“Sir, sir, you are crying out in the street,” a young Anabi lady told him. “Are you ill? What are you calling out for?”

“Sin. A little sin, please, for the love of Christ. If there is no sin in my cellar, then the foundation of my house is not what I supposed.”

“Hardly anyone uses sin any more, sir. What a peculiar thing to be crying out in the street for! But I believe there is one shop that still handles it. Here. I will write you the address.”

Padreco Barnaby took the address and ran to the shop. It was not what he sought. Sin was an old name of a scent, but the name had been changed as no longer conveying a meaning.

There were very many of these scent shops. Too many. And the scent of the scent shops was not the odor of sanctity. Was it possible that a new sensuality had taken the place of the old?

And the other shops — block after block of them — what were they for? What were the uses of the strange apparatus displayed in them? And why should the give that sticky feeling of menace?

The Padreco spent a long day wandering through the capital city of Analos. The pavements were green and artfully shadow-painted so as to resemble turf. The effect, however, was not that of placid nature; it was of a primordial wildness able to break through the thin shell at any time. And what was the new weirdness that came over him when he walked through the parks. The earlier explorer had been mistaken: the plants of Analos did not resemble the undersea plants of Earth; they resembled the undersea animals. They leered like devilfish and grinned like sharks.

It was here everywhere. But it had changed its name.

It was with shameful triumph that Padreco Barnaby first uncovered the sweeping outlines of the thing. It was with growing horror that he amassed the details. When he had enough of it, he went back to Landmaster, who was now with several others of his kind.

“Repent! Repent!” the Padreco called to them. “The ax is already laid to the roots. The tree that bears evil fruit will be cut down and cast into

the fire!”

“Of what should we repent, little priest?” Landmaster asked.

“Of your sins! At once! Before it is too late!”

“I have explained to you that we have no sins, little priest; and that we could not have them according to our developing nature. Your repetition would annoy us... if we ever let anything annoy us.”

Landmaster made a sign to one of his fellows, who left them at once.

“What were the rather humorous names you gave them this morning?” Landmaster asked, turning again to the priest.

“You remember the names I gave. Now I give others. Too effete for the ancient sins themselves, you have the deadly shadows of them: presumption, establishment, ruthlessness, selfishness, satiety, monopoly, despair.”

“An interesting argument. We have a Department of Interesting Arguments. You should go there and have it recorded.”

“I will record it here. You practice infanticide, juvenicide senectucide, suicide.”

“Yes, the Gentle Terminators.”

“You murder your own children who do not measure up to your atrocious norm.”

“Judicious Selection.”

“You have invented new lusts and perversions.”

“Refined Amusements.”

“There are the evil who are evil openly. There are the evil who hide their evil and deny that they are venomous. There are the ultimate in evil who keep the venom and change the Name of the Snake.”

“I’m happy that we’re the ultimate,” said Landmaster. “We would be affronted by a lesser classification.”

Padreco Barnaby raised his head.

“I smell wood burning,” he said suddenly. “You no longer use wood for fuel here.”

“In one case only,” said Landmaster. “An ancient and seldom employed ritual of ours.”

“Which?”

“You do not understand, little priest? Ten million Earth cartoons of the thing and still you do not understand them or comprehend their origin. What is the unvarying fate of the Missioner cast up on the Savage

Shore?”

“You are not supposed to be savage.”

“We revert, little priest. In this one case we revert. It is our ancient answer to the obstreperous missionary who persists in asking us the irksome question. We cannot allow ourselves to be irked.”

Padreco Barnaby couldn't believe it. Even after they put him in the monstrous kettle he couldn't believe it. They were setting the long tables for the feast — and surely it was all a mistake!

“Landmaster! You people — you creatures — can't be serious!”

“Why no, little priest. This is a comical affair. Why should we be serious? Do you not think it comical that the missionary should be boiled in a pot?”

“No! No! It's ghastly!”

This had to be a dream — an underwater nightmare.

“Why did you make ten million comical cartoons of the thing if you didn't find it comic?” Landmaster asked with black pleasure.

“I didn't make them! Yes, I did — two of them — when I was a seminarian, and for our own little publication. Landmaster! The water is hellish hot!”

“Are we magicians that we can boil a man in cold water?”

“Not — not shoes and all?” the Padreco gasped. That seemed to be the ultimate outrage.

“Shoes and all, little priest. We like the flavor. What was your own favorite caption for the race-memory cartoons, Padreco?”

“You can't do this to me!!”

“Yes, that was a good one. But it was the subscript, as I remember it, and the caption was ‘Famous Last Words.’ However, my own favorite, while it concerns anthropophagi, does not concern a missionary. It was the cannibal chief who said, ‘My wife makes a fine soup. I'll miss her.’ What was your favorite of the kettle jokes, Shareshuffler?”

Shareshuffler had a great two-tined fork, and he stuck it into Padreco Barnaby to see if he was done yet. The Padreco was far from done, and the clamor he set up made it impossible to hear Shareshuffler's own favorite of the folk jokes. This is a loss, for it was one of the best of them all.

How loud the little priest was against the Anabi carrying out their ancient custom!

“A lobster doesn’t make such a noise when he’s boiled,” chided Landmaster. “An oyster doesn’t, and a Xtleconutlico doesn’t. Why should a man make such a noise? It would be irritating to us — if we ever let anything irritate us.”

But they didn’t — nothing at all. They were too developed a race to allow themselves to be irritated.

When the Padreco was finally done, they had him out of the kettle and polished him off. They dealt in the prescribed manner with the ancient menace, and they had a superb feast out of it too.

The Anabi weren’t quite what they seemed. They had hid from themselves, and dealt in shadows instead of things. They had even changed the name of their nature... but they hadn’t changed their nature.

But on occasion they could still revert. They could stage an old-time, red-blooded, slumgullion-slurping, bone-gnawing dangeroo of a feast. Men and monsters, they did have one now!

Citizens, that Padreco had good stuff in him!

## THE WEIRDEST WORLD

### I

As I am now utterly without hope, lost to my mission and lost in the sight of my crew, I will record what petty thoughts I may have for what benefit they may give some other starfarer. Nine long days of bickering! But the decision is sure. The crew will maroon me. I have lost all control over them.

Who would have believed that I would show such weakness when crossing the barrier? By all tests I should have been the strongest. But the final test was the event itself. I failed.

I only hope that it is a pleasant and habitable planet where they put me down...

Later. They have decided. I am no longer the captain even in name. But they have compassion on me. They will do what they can for my comfort. I believe that they have already selected my desert island, so to speak, an out-of-the-way globe where they will leave me to die. I will hope for the best. I no longer have any voice in their councils...

Later. I will be put down with only the basic survival kit: the ejection mortar and sphere for my last testament to be orbited into the Galactic drift; a small cosmoscope so that I will at least have my bearings; one change of blood;. An abridged universal language correlator; a compendium of the one thousand philosophic questions yet unsolved to exercise my mind; a small vial of bug-kill.

Later. It has been selected. But my mind has grown so demoralized that I do not even recognize the system, though once this particular region was my specialty. The globe will be habitable. There will be breathable atmosphere which will allow me to dispense with much bothersome equipment. Here the filler used is nitrogen, yet it will not matter. I have breathed nitrogen before. There will be water, much of it saline, but sufficient quantities of sweet. Food will be no problem; before being marooned, I will receive injections that should last me for the rest of my probably short life. Gravity will be within the range of my constitution.

What will be lacking? Nothing, but the companionship of my own kind, which is everything.

What a terrible thing it is to be marooned!



One of my teachers used to say that the only unforgivable ~n in the universe is ineptitude. That I should be the first to succumb to space-ineptitude and be an awkward burden on the rest of them! But it would be disastrous for them to try to travel any longer with a sick man, particularly as their nominal leader. I would be a shadow over them. I hold them no rancor.

It will be today

Later. I am here. I have no real interest in defining where “here” is, though I have my cosmoscope and could easily determine it. I was anesthetized a few hours before, and put down here in my sleep. The blasted half-acre of their landing is near. No other trace of them is left.

Yet it is a good choice and not greatly unlike home. It is the nearest resemblance I have seen on the entire voyage, which is to say that the pseudodendrons are enough like trees to remind me of trees, the herbage near enough to grass to satisfy one who had never known real grass. It is a green, somewhat waterlogged land of pleasant temperature.

The only inhabitants I have encountered are a preoccupied race of hump-backed browsers who pay me scant notice. They are quadruped and myopic, and spend nearly their entire time at feeding. It may be that I am invisible to them. Yet they hear my voice and shy away somewhat from it. I am able to communicate with them only poorly. Their only vocalization is a sort of vibrant windy roar, but when I answer in kind they appear more puzzled than communicative.

They have this peculiarity: when they come to an obstacle of terrain or thicket, they either go laboriously around it or force their way through it. It does not seem to occur to them to fly over it: They are as gravity-bound as a newborn baby.

What air-traveling creatures I have met are of a consider-ably smaller size. They are more vocal than the myopic quadrupeds, and I have had some success in conversing with them, but my results still await a more leisurely semantic interpretation. Such communications of theirs as I have analyzed are quite commonplace. They have no real philosophy and are singularly lacking in aspiration; they are almost total extroverts and have no more than the rudiments of introspection.

Yet they have managed to tell me some amusing anecdotes. They are quite good natured, though moronic.

They say that neither they nor the myopic quadrupeds are the

dominant race here, but rather a large grublike creature lacking a complete outer covering. From what they are able to convey of this breed, it is a nightmarish kind of creation. One of the flyers even told me that the giant grubs travel upright on a bifurcated tail, but that is difficult to credit. Besides, I believe that humor is at least a minor component of the mentality of my airy friends. I will call them birds, though they are but a sorry caricature of the birds at home...

Later. I am being hunted. I am being hunted by the giant grubs. Doubling back, I have seen them on my trail, examining it with great curiosity.

The birds had given me a very inadequate idea of these. They are indeed unfinished — they do lack a complete outer covering. Despite their giant size, I am convinced that they are grubs, living under rocks and in masses of rotten wood. Nothing in nature gives the impression of so lacking an outer covering as the grub, that obese, unfinished worm.

There are, however, simple bipeds. They are wrapped in a cocoon which they seem never to have shed, as though their emergence from the larval state were incomplete. It is a loose artificial sheath covering the central portion of the corpus. They seem unable to divest themselves of it, though it is definitely not a part of the body. When I have analyzed their minds, I will know the reason for their carrying it. Now I can only conjecture. It would seem a compulsion, some psychological bond that dooms them in their apparent adult state to carry their cocoons with them.

Later. I am captured by three of the giant grubs. I had barely time to swallow my communication sphere. They pinned me down and beat me with sticks. I was taken by surprise and was not momentarily able to solve their language, though it came to me after a short interval. It was discordant and vocal and entirely gravity-bound, by which I mean that its thoughts were chained to its words. There seemed nothing in them above the vocal. In this the giant grubs were less than the birds, even though they had a practical power and cogency that the birds lacked.

“What’ll we do with the blob?” asked one.

“Hy,” said the second, “you hit it on that end and I’ll hit it on this. We don’t know which end is the head.”

“Let’s try it for bait,” said the third. “Catfish might go for it.”

“We could keep it alive till we’re ready to use it. Then it would stay

fresh.”

‘is. “No, let’s kill it. It doesn’t look too fresh, even the way it  
“Gentlemen, you are making a mistake,” I said. “I have done nothing to  
merit death. And I am not without talent. Besides, you have not  
considered the possibility that I may be forced to kill you three instead. I  
will not die willingly. And I will thank you to stop pounding on me with  
those sticks. It hurts.”

I was surprised and shocked at the sound of my own voice. It was  
nearly as harsh as that of the grubs. But this was my first attempt at their  
language, and musicality does not become it.

“Hey fellows, did you hear that? Was that the blob talking? Or was one  
of you playing a joke? Harry? Stanley? Have you been practicing to be  
ventriloquists?”

Not me.” “Not me either. It sure sounded like it was it.”

“Hey blob, was that you? Can you talk, blob?”

“Certainly I can talk,” I responded. “I am not an infant. Nor am I a  
blob. I am a creature superior to your own kind, if you are examples. Or it  
may be that you are only children. Perhaps you are still in the pupa stage.  
Tell me, is yours an early stage, or an arrested development, or are you  
indeed adult?”

Hey fellows, we don’t have to take that from any blob. I’ll cave in his  
blasted head.”

“That isn’t its head, it’s its tail.”

“Gentlemen, perhaps I can set you straight,” I said. “That is my tail  
you are thwacking with those sticks, and I am warning you to stop it. Of  
course I was talking with my tail. I was only doing it in imitation of you. I  
am new at the language and its manner of speaking. Yet it may be that I  
have made a grotesque mistake. Is that your heads that you are waving in  
the air? Well, then, I will talk with my head, if that is the custom. But I  
warn you again not to hit me on either end with those sticks.”

“Hey, fellows, I bet we could sell that thing. I bet we could sell it to  
Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm.”

“How would we get it there?”

“Make it walk. Hey blob, can you walk?”

“I can travel, certainly, but I would not stagger along precariously on a  
pair of flesh stilts with my head in the air, as you do. When I travel, I do  
not travel upside down.”

“Well, let’s go then. We’re going to sell you to Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm. If he can use a blob, he’ll put you in one of the tanks with the big turtles and alligators. You think you’ll like them?”

“I am lonesome in this lost world,” I replied sadly, “and even the company of you peeled grubs is better than nothing I am anxious to adopt a family and settle down here for what years of life I have left. It may be that I will find compatibility with the species you mention. I do not know what they are.”

“Hey, fellows, this blob isn’t a bad guy at all. I’d shake your hands, blob, if I knew where they were. Let’s go to Billy Wilkins’s place and sell him.”

## II

We traveled to Billy Wilkins's place. My friends were amazed when I took to the air and believed that I had deserted them. They had no cause to distrust me. Without them I would have had to rely on intuition to reach Billy Wilkins, and even then I would lack the proper introductions.

"Hey, Billy," said my loudest friend whose name was Cecil, "what will you give us for a blob? It flies and talks and isn't a bad fellow at all. You'd get more tourists to come to your reptile show if you had a talking blob in it. He could sing song', and tell stories, and I bet he could play the guitar."

"Well, Cecil, I'll just give you all ten dollars for it and try to figure out what it is later. I'm a little ahead on my hunches now, so I can afford to gamble on this one. I can always pickle it and exhibit it as a genuine hippopotamus kidney."

"Thank you, Billy. Take care of yourself, blob."

"Good-bye for now, gentlemen," I said. "I would like you to visit me some evening as soon as I am acclimated to my new surroundings. I will throw a whing-ding for you — as soon as I find out what a whing-ding is."

"My God," said Billy Wilkins, "it talks, it really talks!"

"We told you it could talk and fly, Billy."

"Talks, it talks," said Billy. "Where's that blasted sign painter? Eustace, come here. We got to paint a new sign."

The turtles in the tank I was put into did have a sound basic philosophy which was absent in the walking grubs. But they were slow and lacking inner fire. They would not be obnoxious company, but neither would they give me excitement and warmth. I was really more interested in the walking grubs.

Eustace was a black grub, while the others had all been white; but like them he had no outside casing of his own, and like them he also staggered about on flesh stilts with his head in the air.

It wasn't that I was naive or hadn't seen bipeds before. But I don't believe anyone ever becomes entirely accustomed to seeing a biped travel in its peculiar manner.

Good afternoon, Eustace," I said pleasantly enough. The eyes of Eustace were large and white. He was a more handsome specimen than the other grubs.

"That you talking, bub? Say, you really can talk, can't you? I thought Mr. Billy was fooling. Now just hold that expression a minute and let me

get it set in my mind. I can paint anything, once I get it set in my mind. What's your name, blob? Have blobs names?"

"Not in your manner. With us the name and the soul, I believe you call it, are the same thing and cannot be vocalized. I will have to adopt a name of your sort. What would be a good name?"

"Bob, I was always partial to George Albert Leroy Ellery. That was my grandfather's name."

"Should I also have a family name?"

"Sure."

"What would you suggest?"

"How about McIntosh?"

"That will be fine. I will use it."

I talked to the turtles while Eustace was painting my portrait on tent canvas.

"Is the name of this world Florida?" I asked one of them. "The road signs said Florida."

"World, world, world, water, water, water, glub, glug, glub," said one of them.

"Yes, but is this particular world we are on named Florida?"

"World, world, water, water, glub," said another.

"Eustace, I can get nothing from these fellows," I called. "is this world named Florida?"

"Mr. George Albert, you are right in the middle of Florida, the greatest state in the universe."

"Having traveled, Eustace, I have great reservations that it is the greatest. But it is my new home and I must cultivate a loyalty to it."

I went up in a tree to give advice to two young birds trying to construct a nest. This was obviously their first venture.

"You are going about it all wrong," I told them. "First consider that this will be your home, and then consider how you can make your home most beautiful."

"This is the way they've always built them," said one of the birds.

"There must be an element of utility, yes," I told them. "But the dominant motif should be beauty. The impression of expanded vistas can be given by long low walls and parapets."

"This is the way they've always built them," said the other bird.

"Remember to embody all the new developments," I said. "Just say to

yourself ‘This is the newest nest in the world.’ Always say that about any task you attempt. It inspires you.”

“This is the way they’ve always built them,” said the birds. “Go build your own nest.”

Mr. George Albert,” called Eustace. “Mr. Billy won’t like your flying around those trees. You’re supposed to stay in your tank.”

“I was only getting a little air and talking to the birds,” I said.

“You can talk to the birds?” asked Eustace.

“Cannot anyone?”

“I can, a little,” said Eustace. “I didn’t know anyone else could.”

But when Billy Wilkins returned and heard the report that I had been lying about, I was put in the snake house, in a cage that was tightly meshed top and sides. My cell mate was a surly python named Pete.

“See you stay on that side,” said Pete. “You’re too big for me to swallow. But I might try.”

“There is something bothering you, Pete,” I said. “You have a bad disposition. That can come only from bad digestion or a bad conscience.”

“I have both,” said Pete. “The first because I bolt my food. The second is because — well I forget the reason, but it’s my conscience.”

“Think hard, Pete,” I said, “why have you a bad conscience.”

“Snakes always have bad consciences. We have forgotten the crime, but we remember the guilt.”

“Perhaps you should seek advice from someone, Pete.”

“I kind of think it was someone’s smooth advice that started us on all this. He talked the legs right off US.”

Billy Wilkins came to the cage with another “man” as walking grubs call themselves.

“That it?” asked the other man. “And you say it can talk?”

“Of course I can talk,” I answered for Billy Wilkins. “I have never known a creature who couldn’t talk in some manner. My name is George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh. I don’t believe that I heard yours, sir.”

“Bracken. Blackjack Bracken. I was telling Billy here that if he really had a blob that could talk, that I might be able to use it in my night club. We could have you here at the Snake Ranch in the daytime for the tourists and kids. Then I could have you at the club at night. We could work out an act. Do you think you could learn to play the guitar?”

“Probably. But it would be much easier for me merely to duplicate the

sound.”

“But then how could you sing and make guitar noises at the same time?”

“You surely don’t think that I am limited to one voice box?”

“Oh, I didn’t know. What’s that big metal ball you have there?”

“That’s my communication sphere to record my thoughts. I would not be without it. When in danger, I swallow it. When in extreme danger, I will have to escape to a spot where I have concealed my ejection mortar, and send my sphere into the Galactic drift on a chance that it may be found.”

“That’s no kind of gag to put in an act. What I have in mind is something like this.”

Blackjack Bracken told a joke. It was a childish one and in poor taste.

“I don’t believe that is quite my style,” I said.

“All right, what would you suggest?”

“I thought that I might lecture your patrons on the higher ethic.”

Look, George Albert, my patrons don’t even have the lower ethic.”

“And just what sort of recompense are we talking about?” I asked.

“Billy and I had about settled on a hundred and fifty a week.”

“A hundred and fifty for whom?”

“Why, for Billy.”

“I say a hundred and fifty for myself, and ten percent for Billy as my agent.”

“Say, this blob’s real smart, isn’t he, Billy?”

“Too smart.”

“Yes sir, George Albert, you’re one smart blob. What kind of contract have you signed with Billy here?”

“No contract.”

“Just a gentlemen’s agreement?”

“No agreement.”

“Billy, you can’t hold him in a cage without a contract. That’s slavery. It’s against the law.”

“But, Blackjack, a blob isn’t people.”

“Try proving that in court. Will you sign a contract with me, George Albert?”

“I will not dump Billy. He befriended me and gave me a home with the turtles and snakes. I will sign a joint contract with the two of you. We will



discuss terms tomorrow — after I have estimated the attendance both here and at the night club.”

### III

Of the walking grubs (who call themselves “people”) there are two kinds, and they place great emphasis on the difference. From this stems a large part of their difficulties. This distinction, which is one of polarity, cuts quite across the years and ability and station of life. It is not confined only to the people, but also involves apparently all the beings on the planet Florida.

It appears that a person is committed to one or the other polarity at the beginning of life, maintaining that polarity until death. The interlocking attraction-repulsion complex set up by these two opposable types has deep emotional involvements. It is the cause of considerable concern and disturbance, as well as desire and inspiration. There is a sort of poetic penumbra about the whole thing that tends to disguise its basic simplicity, expressible as a simultaneous polarity equation.

Complete segregation of the two types seems impossible. If it has ever been tried, it has now been abandoned as impractical.

There is indeed an intangible difference between the two types, so that before that first day at the Reptile Ranch was finished, I was able to differentiate between the two more than ninety percent of the time. The knowledge of this difference in polarity seems to be intuitive.

These two I will call the Beta and Gamma, or Boy and Girl types. I began to see that this opposability of the two types was one of the great driving forces of the people.

In the evening I was transported to the night club and I was a success. I would not entertain them with blue jokes or blue lyrics, but the patrons seemed fascinated by my simple imitations of all the instruments of the orchestra and my singing of comic ballads that Eustace had taught me in odd moments that day. They were also interested in the way that I drank gin, that is emptying the bottle without breaking the seal. (It seems that the grub-people are unable to absorb a liquid without making direct contact with it.)

And I met Margaret, one of the “girl” singers. I had been wondering to which type of people I might show amnity. Now I knew. I was definitely a Beta type, for I was attracted to Margaret, who was unmistakably a Gamma. I began to understand the queer effect that these types have on each other.

She came over to my cage.

“I want to rub your head for luck before I go on,” she said.

Thank you, Margaret,” I replied, “but that is not my head.”

She sang with incomparable sadness, with all the sorrow and sordidness that appear to be the lot of the unfortunate Gammas. It was the essence of melancholy made into music. It was a little bit like the ghost music of the asteroid Artemis, a little like the death chants on Dolmena. Sex and sorrow. Nostalgia. Regret.

Her singing shook me with a yearning that had no precedent.

She came back to my cage.

“You were wonderful, Margaret,” I said.

“I’m always wonderful when I’m singing for my supper. I am less wonderful in the rare times when I am well fed. But are you happy, little buddy?”

“I had become almost so, till I heard you sing. Now I am overcome with a sorrow and longing. Margaret, I am fascinated with you.”

“I go for you too, blob. You’re my buddy. Isn’t it funny that the only buddy I have in the world is a blob. But if you’d seen some of the guys I’ve been married to — boy! I wouldn’t insult you by calling them blobs. Have to go now. See you tomorrow night if they keep us both on.

Now there was a problem to face. It was necessary that I establish control over my environment, and at once. How else could I aspire to Margaret?

I knew that the heart of the entire place here was neither the bar nor the entertainment therein, nor the cuisine, nor the dancing. The heart of the enterprise was the casino. Here was the money that mattered; the rest was but garnish.

I had them bring me into the gambling rooms.

I had expected problems of complexity here where the patrons worked for their gain or loss. Instead there was an almost amazing simplicity. All the games were based on a system of first aspect numbers. Indeed everything on the Planet Florida seemed based on first aspect numbers.

Now it is an elemental fact that first aspect numbers do not carry within them their own prediction. Nor were the people even possessed of the prediction key that lies over the very threshold of the second aspect series.

These people were actually wagering sums — the symbols of prosperity — blindly, not knowing for sure whether they would win or

lose. They were selecting numbers by hunch or at random with no assurance of profit. They were choosing a hole for a ball to fall into without knowing whether that was the right hole.

I do not believe that I was ever so amazed at anything in my life.

But here was an opportunity to establish control over my environment.

I began to play the games. Usually I would watch a round first, to be sure that I understood just what was going on. Then I would play a few times... as many as it took to break the game.

I broke game after game. When he could no longer pay me, Blackjack closed the casino in exasperation.

Then we played poker, he and I and several others. This was even more simple. I suddenly realized that the grub-people could see only one side of the cards at a time.

I played and won.

I owned the casino now, and all of those people were now working for me. Billy Wilkins also played with us, and in short order I also owned the Reptile Ranch.

Before the evening was over, I owned a race-track, a beach hotel, and a theatre in a place named New York.

I had, in sufficient extent for my purpose, established control over my environment...

Later. Now started the golden days. I increased my control and did what I could for my friends.

I got a good doctor for my friend and roommate the python, and he was now receiving treatment for his indigestion. I got a jazzy sports car for my friend Eustace imported from somewhere called Italy. And I buried Margaret in mink, for she had a fix on the fur of that mysterious animal. She enjoyed draping it about her in the form of coats, capes, cloaks, mantles, and stoles, though the weather didn't really require it.

I had now several banks, a railroad, an airline, and a casino in somewhere named Havana.

"You are somebody now," said Margaret. "You really ought to dress better. Or are you dressed? I never know. I don't know if part of that is clothes or if all of it is you. But at least I've learned which is your head. I think we should be married in May. It's so common to be married in June. Just imagine me being Mrs. George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh!

You know, we have become quite an item. And do you know there are three biographies of you out, *Burgeoning Blob*; *The Blow from Way Out*; *The Hidden Hand Behind the Blob, What Does It Portend?* And the Governor has invited us to dine tomorrow. I do wish you would learn to eat. If you weren't so nice, you'd be creepy. I always say there's nothing wrong with marrying a man, or a blob, with money. It shows foresight on the part of a girl. You know you will have to get a blood test? You had better get it tomorrow. You do have blood, don't you?"

I did, but not, of course, of the color and viscosity of hers. But I could give it that color and viscosity temporarily. And it would react negative in all the tests.

She mused, "They are all jealous of me. They say they wouldn't marry a blob. They mean they couldn't. Do you have to carry that tin ball with you all the time?"

"Yes. It is my communication sphere. In it I record my thoughts. I would be lost without it."

"Oh, like a diary. How quaint."

Yes, those were the golden days. The grubs now appeared to me in a new light, for was not Margaret also a grub? Yet she seemed not so unfinished as the rest. Though lacking a natural outer covering, yet she had not the appearance of crawling out from under a rock. She was quite an attractive "girl." And she cared for me.

What more could I wish? I was affluent. I was respected. I was in control of my environment. And I could aid my friends of whom I had now acquired an astonishing number.

Moreover my old space-ineptitude sickness had left me. I never felt better in my life. Ah, golden days, one after the other like a pleasant dream. And soon I am to be married.

#### IV

There has been a sudden change. As on the Planet Hecube, where full summer turns into the dead of winter in minutes, to the destruction of many travelers, so was it here. My world is threatened!

It is tottering, all that I have built up. I will fight. I will fight. I will have the best lawyers on the planet. I am not done. But I am threatened

Later. This may be the end. The appeal court has given its decision. A blob may not own property in Florida. A blob is not a person.

Of course I am not a person. I never pretended to be. But I am a personage. I will yet fight this thing...

Later. I have lost everything. The last appeal is gone. By definition I am an animal of indeterminate origin, and my property is being completely stripped from me.

I made an eloquent appeal — and it moved them greatly. There were tears in their eyes. But there was greed in the set of their mouths. They have a vested interest in stripping me. Each will seize a little.

And I am left a pauper, a vassal, an animal, a slave. This is always the last doom of the marooned, to be a despised alien at the mercy of a strange world.

Yet it should not be hopeless. I will have Margaret. Since my contract with Billy Wilkins and Blackjack Bracken, long since bought up, is no longer in effect, Margaret should be able to handle my affairs as a person. I believe that I have great earning powers yet, and I can win as much as I wish by gambling. We will treat this as only a technicality. We shall acquire new fortune. I will re-establish control over my environment. I will bring back the golden days. A few of my old friends are still loyal to me, Margaret, Pete the python, Eustace...

Later. The world has caved in completely. Margaret has thrown me over.

“I’m sorry, blobby,” she said, “but it just won’t work. You’re still nice, but without money you are only a blob. How would I marry a blob?”

“But we can earn more money. I am talented.”

“No, you’re box-office poison now. You were a fad, and fads die quickly.”

“But Margaret, I can win as much as I wish by gambling.”

“Not a chance, blobby. Nobody will gamble with you any more. You’re through, blob. I will miss you, though. There will be a new blue note in

my ballads when I sing for my supper, after the mink coats are all gone. Bye now.”

“Margaret, do not leave me. What of all our golden days together?”

But all she said was “bye now.” And she was gone forever.

I am desolate and my old space-ineptitude sickness has returned. My recovery was an illusion. I am so ill with awkwardness that I can no longer fly. I must crawl on the ground like one of the giant grubs. A curse on this planet Florida, and all its sister orbs! What a miserable world this is!

How could I have been taken in by a young Gamma type of the walking grub? Let her crawl back under her ancestral rocks with all the rest of her kind... No, no, I do not mean that. To me she will always remain a dream, a broken dream. I am no longer welcome at the casino. They kicked me down the front steps.

I no longer have a home at the Reptile Ranch.

“Mr. George Albert,” said Eustace, “I just can’t afford to be seen with you any more. I have my position to consider, with a sport car and all that.”

And Pete the python was curt.

“Well, big shot, I guess you aren’t so big after all. And you were sure no friend of mine. When you had that doctor cure me of my indigestion, you left me with nothing but my bad conscience. I wish I could get my indigestion back.”

“A curse on this world,” I said.

“World, world, water, water, glug, glug,” said the turtles in their tanks, my only friends.

So I have gone back into the woods to die. I have located my ejection mortar, and when I know that death is finally on me, I will fire off my communication sphere and hope it will reach the Galactic drift. Whoever finds it — friend, space traveler, you who were too impatient to remain on your own world — be you warned of this one! Here ingratitude is the rule and cruelty the main sport. The unfinished grubs have come out from under their rocks and they walk this world upside down with their heads in the air. Their friendship is fleeting, their promises are like the wind.

I am near my end.

## ALOYS

He had flared up more brightly than anyone in memory. And then he was gone. Yet there was ironic laughter where he had been; and his ghost still walked. That was the oddest thing: to encounter his ghost.

It was like coming suddenly on Halley's Comet drinking beer at the Plugged Nickle Bar, and having it deny that it was a celestial phenomenon at all, that it had ever been beyond the sun.

For he could have been the man of the century, and now it was not even known if he was alive. And if he were alive, it would be very odd if he would be hanging around places like the Plugged Nickel Bar.

This all begins with the award. But before that it begins with the man.

Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg was acutely embarrassed and in a state of dread.

"These I have to speak to, all these great men. Is even glory worth the price when it must be paid in such coin?"

Aloys did not have the amenities, the polish, the tact. A child of penury, he had all his life eaten bread that was part sawdust, and worn shoes that were part card-board. He had an overcoat that had been his father's, and before that his grandfather's, willed for generations to the eldest son.

This coat was no longer handsome, its holes being stuffed and quilted with ancient rags. It was long past its years of greatness, and even when Aloys had inherited it as a young man it was in the afternoon of its life. And yet it was worth more than anything else he owned in the world.

Professor Aloys had become great in spite of — or because of? — his poverty. He had worked out his finest theory, a series of nineteen interlocked equations of cosmic shapeliness and simplicity. He had worked it out on a great piece of butchers' paper soaked with lamb's blood, and had so given it to the world.

And once it was given, it was almost as though nothing else could be added on any subject whatsoever. Any further detailing would be only footnotes to it and ~ the sciences no more than commentaries.

Naturally this made him famous. But the beauty of it was that it made him famous, not to the commonalty of mankind (this would have been a burden to his sensitively tuned soul), but to a small and scattered class of extremely erudite men (about a score of them in the world). By them his



worth was recognized, and their recognition brought him almost complete satisfaction.

But he was not famous in his own street or his own quarter. And it was in this stark conglomerate of dark-souled alleys and roofs that Professor Aloys had lived all his life till just thirty-seven days ago.

When he received the announcement, award, and invitation, he quickly calculated the time. It was not very long to allow for traveling halfway around the world. Being locked out of his rooms, as he often was, he was unencumbered with baggage or furniture, and he left for the ceremony at once.

With the announcement, award, and invitation, there had also been a check; but as he was not overly familiar with the world of finance or with the English language in which the check was drawn, he did not recognize it for what it was. Having used the back of it to write down a formula that had crept into his mind, he shoved the check, forgotten, into one of the pockets of his greatcoat.

For three days he rode the riverboat to the port city hidden and hungry. There he concealed himself on an ocean tramp. That he did not starve on this was due to the caprice of certain lowlifes who discovered him, for they made him stay hidden in a terrible bunker, and every day they passed in a bucket to him. And sometimes this contained food. But sometimes offal.

Then, several ports and many days later, he left the ship like a crippled, dirty animal. And it was in That City and on That Day. For the award was to be that evening.

“All these I have to speak to, all these wonderful men who are higher than the grocers, higher even than the butchers. These men get more respect than a policeman, than a canal boat captain. They are wiser than a mayor and more honored than a merchant. They know arts more intricate than a clock-maker’s and are virtuous beyond the politicians. More perspicacious than editors, more talented than actors, these are the great men of the world. And I am only Aloys, and now I am too ragged and dirty even to be Aloys anymore. I am no longer a man with a name.”

For he was very humble as he walked the great town where even the shop girls dressed like princesses, and all the restaurants were so fine that only the rich people would have dared to go into them at all. Had there been poor people (and there were none) there would have been no

place for them to eat. They would have starved.

“But it is to me that they have given the prize. Not to Schellendore and not to Otteman, not to Francks nor Timiryaseff, not even to Piritim-Kess, the latchet of whose shoe I am not — but why do I say that? — he is not after all very bright — all of them are inadequate in some way—the only one who was ever able to get to the heart of these great things was Aloys Foulcault-Oeg, who happens to be myself. It is a strange thing that they should honor me, and yet I believe they could not have made a better choice.”

So pride and fear warred in him, but it was always the pride that lost. For he had only a little bit of pride, undernourished and on quaking ground, and against it were a whole legion of fears, apprehensions, shames, dreads, embarrassments, and nightmarish bashfulnesses.

He begged a little bit when he found a poor part of town. But even here the people were of the rich poor, not of the poor as he had known them.

When he had money in his pocket, he had a meal. Then he went to the Jiffy Quick While You Wait Cleaners Open Day and Night to have his clothes cleaned. He wrapped himself in dignity and a blanket while he waited, as many years before he had had to forego the luxury of underclothes. And as the daylight was coming to an end they brought his clothes back to him.

“We have done all we could do,” they told him. “If we had a day or a week or a month we might do a little more, but not much. We have not done anything at all to the greatcoat. The workers were afraid of it. They said it barked at them.”

“Yes, sometimes it will do that.”

Then he went out into the town, cleaner than he had been in many days, and he walked to the hall of the Commendation and Award. Here he watched all the great men arrive in private cars and taxis: Ergodic Eimer, August Angstrom, Vladimir Vor. He watched them and thought of what he would say to them, and then he realized that he had forgotten his English.

“I remember Sir or Madam as the Case May Be. I remember Dog, that is the first word I ever learned, but what will I say to them about a dog? I remember house and horse and apple and fish. Oh, now I remember the entire language. But what if I forget it again? Would it not be an odd

speech if I could only say apple and fish and house and dog? I would be shamed.”

He wished he were rich and could dress in fine white like the streetsweepers, or in black leather like the newsboy on the corner. He saw Edward Edelsteim and Christopher Cronin enter and he cowed on the street and knew that he would never be able to talk to those great men.

A fine gentleman came out and walked directly to him.

“You are the great Professor Foulcault-Oeg? I would have known you anywhere. True greatness shines from you. Our city is honored tonight. Come inside and we will go to a little room apart, for I see that you will have to compose yourself first. I am Graf-Doktor Hercule Bienville-Stravroguine.”

Why he ever said he was the Graf-Doktor is a mystery, because he was Willy McGilly and the other was just a name that he made up that minute.

Within they went to a small room behind the cloak room. But here, in spite of the smooth kindness of the gracious gentleman, Aloys knew that he would never be able to compose himself. He was an epouvantail, a pugalo, a clown, a ragamuffin. He looked at the nineteen-point outline of the address he was to give. He shuddered and quaked, he gobbled like a turkey. He sniffled and he wiped his nose on his sleeve. He was terrified that the climax of his life’s work should find him too craven to accept it. And he discovered that he had forgotten his English again.

“I remember bread and butter, but I don’t know which one goes on top. I know pencil and penknife and bed, but I have entirely forgotten the word for maternal uncle. I remember plow, but what in the world will I say to all those great men about a plow? I pray that this cup may pass from me.

Then he disintegrated completely in one abject mass of terror.

Several minutes went by.

But when he emerged from that room he was a different man entirely. Erect, alive, intense, queerly handsome, and now in formal attire, he mounted with the sure grace of a panther to the speaker’s platform.

Once only he glanced at the nineteen-point outline of his address. As there is no point in keeping it a secret, it was as follows: 1. Cepheid and Cerium — How long is a Yardstick? 2. Double Trouble — Is Ours a Binary Universe? 3. Cerebrum and Cortex — The Mathematics of Melanchoha. 4.

Microphysics and Megacyclic Polyneums. 5. Ego, No, Hemeis — The Personality of the Subconscious. 6. Linear Convexity and Lateral Intransigence. 7. Betelgeuse Betrayed — The Myth of Magnitude. 8. Mu-Meson, the Secret of the Metamorphosis. 9. Theogony and Tremor — The Mathematics of Seismology. 10. Planck's Constant and Agnesi's Variable. 11. Diencephalon and Di-Gamma — Unconscionable Thoughts About Consciousness. 12. Inverse Squares and the Quintesimal Radicals. 13. The Chain of Error in the Linear-B Translation — Or Where the Cretans Really Came From. 14. Cybernetics — Or a Brain for Every Man. 15. Ogive and Volute — Thoughts of Celestial Curvature. 16. Conic Sections — Small Pieces of Infinity. 17. Eschatology — Medium Thoughts About the End. 18. Hypolarity and Cosmic Hysterisis. 19. The Invisible Quadratic — or This Is All Simpler Than You Think.

You will immediately see the beauty of this skeleton, and yet to flesh it would not be the work of an ordinary man.

He glanced over it with a sure smile of complete confidence. Then he spoke softly to the master of ceremonies in a queer whisper with a rumble in it that could be heard throughout the Hall.

“I am here. I will begin. There is no need for any further introduction. It will be late by the time I finish.”

For the next three and a half hours he held that intelligent audience completely spellbound, enchanted. They followed, or seemed to follow, his lightning flashes of metaphor illumining the craggy chasms of his vast subjects.

They thrilled to the magnetic power of his voice, urbane yet untamed, with its polyglot phrasing and its bare touch of accent so strange as to be baffling; ancient surely and European, and yet from a land beyond the pale. And they quivered with interior pleasure at the glorious unfolding in climax after climax of these before only half-glimpsed vistas.

Here was the world of mystery revealed in all its wildness, and it obeyed and stood still, and he named its name. The nebula and the conch lay down together, and the ultra-galaxies equated themselves with the zeta mesons. Like the rich householder, he brought from his store treasures old and new, and nothing like them had ever been seen or heard before.

At one point Professor Timiryaseff cried out in bafflement and incomprehension, and Doctor Ergodic Eimer buried his face in his hands,

for even these most erudite men could not glimpse all the shattering profundity revealed by the fantastic speaker.

And when it was over they were delighted that so much had been made known to them like a great free gift. They had the crown without the cross, and the odd little genius had filled them all with a rich glow.

The rest was perfunctory: commendations and testimonials from all the great men. The trophy, heavy and rich but not flashy, worth the lifetime salary of a professor of mathematics, was accepted almost carelessly. And then the cup was passed quietly, which is to say the tall cool glasses went around as the men lingered and talked with hushed pleasure.

“Gin,” said the astonishing orator. “It is the drink of the bums and impoverished scholars, and I am both. Yes, anything at all with it.”

Then he spoke to Maecenas, who was at his side, the patron who was footing the bill for all this gracious extravagance.

“The check I have never cashed, having been much in movement since I have received it. And as to me it is a large amount, though perhaps not to others, and as you yourself have signed it, I wonder if you would cash it for me now.

“At once,” said Maecenas, “at once. Ten minutes and we shall have the sum here. Ah, you have endorsed it with a formula! Who but the Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg could be so droll? Look, he has endorsed it with a formula.”

“Look, look, let us copy. Why, this is marvelous. It takes us even beyond his great speech of tonight. The implications of it!”

“Oh, the implications!” they said as they copied it off, and the implications rang in their heads like bells of the future.

Now it has suddenly become very late, and the elated little man with the gold and gemmed trophy under one arm and the packet of bank notes in his pocket disappeared as by magic.

Maecenas went to his villa in the province, which is to say Long Island. And all the Professors, Doctors, and erudite gentlemen went to their homes and lodgings.

But later, and after the excitement had worn off, none of them understood a thing about it at all, not even those who had comprehended part of it before the talk. And this was odd.

They'd been spooked.

Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg was not seen again; or, if seen, he was not known, for hardly anyone would have known his face. In fact, when he had painfully released the bonds by which he had been tied in the little room behind the back room, and had removed the shackles from his ankles, he did not pause at all. Not for many blocks did he even remove the gag from his mouth, not realizing in his confusion what it was that obstructed his speech and breathing. But when he got it out it was a pleasant relief.

A kind gentleman took him in hand, the second to do so that night. He was bundled into a kind of taxi and driven to a mysterious quarter called Wreckville. And deep inside a secret building he was given a bath and a bowl of hot soup. And later he gathered with others at the festive board.

Here Willy McGilly was king. As he worked his way into his cups, with the gold trophy in front of him, he expounded and elucidated.

“I was wonderful. I held them in the palm of my hand. Was I not wonderful, Oeg?”

“I could not hear all, for I was on the floor of the little room. But from what I could hear, yes, you were wonderful.”

It wasn't supposed that Aloys made that speech, was it? It was stated that when he came out of that room he was a different man entirely. Nobody but Willy McGilly would give a talk like that.

“Only once in my life did I give a better speech,” said Willy. “It was the same speech, but it was newer then. That was in Little Dogie, New Mexico, and I was selling a snake-oil derivative whose secret I yet cannot reveal. But I was good tonight and some of them cried. And now what will you do, Oeg? Do you know what we are?”

“Moshennekov.”

“Why, so we are!”

“Schwindlern.”

“The very word.”

“Lowlife con men. And the world you live on is not the one you were born on. I will join you if I may.”

“Oeg, you have a talent for going to the core of the apple.”

For when a man (however unlikely a man) shows real talent, then the Wreckville bunch have to recruit him. They cannot have uncontrolled talent running loose in the commonalty of mankind.

## THE UGLY SEA

“The sea is ugly,” said Sour John, “and it’s peculiar that I’m the only one who ever noticed it. There have been millions of words written on the sea, but nobody has written this. For a time I thought it was just my imagination, that it was only ugly to me. Then I analyzed it and found that it really is ugly.

“It is foul. It is dirtier than a cesspool; yet men who would not willingly bathe in a cesspool will bathe in it. It has the aroma of an open sewer; yet those who would not make a pilgrimage to a sewer will do so to the sea. It is untidy; it is possibly the most untidy thing in the world. And I doubt if there is any practical way to improve it. It cannot be drained; it cannot be covered up; it can only be ignored.

“Everything about it is ignoble. Its animals are baser than those of the land. Its plant life is rootless and protean. It contaminates and wastes the shores. It is an open grave where the living lie down with dead.”

“It does smell a little, Sour John, and it is untidy. But I don’t think it’s ugly. You cannot deny that sometimes it is really beautiful.”

“I do deny it. It has no visual beauty. It is monotonous, with only four or five faces, and all of them coarse. The sun and the sky over it may be beautiful; the land that it borders may be fair; but the old sewer itself is ugly.”

“Then why are you the only one who thinks so?”

“There could be several reasons. One, that I’ve long suspected, is that I’m smarter than other people. And another is that mankind has just decided to deny this ugliness for subconscious reasons, which is to say for no reason at all. The sea is a lot like the subconscious. It may even be the subconscious; that was the teaching of the Thalassalogians. The Peoples of the Plains dreamed of the Sea before they visited it. They were guilty dreams. They knew the sea was there, and they were ashamed of it. The Serpent in the Garden was a Hydra, a water snake. He ascended the river to its source to prove that nothing was beyond his reach. That is the secret we have always to live with: that even the rivers of Paradise flow finally into that evil grave. We are in rhythm with the old ocean: it rises irregularly twice in twenty-four hours, and then repents of rising; and so largely do we.”

“Sour John, I will still love the sea though you say it is ugly.”

“So will I. I did not say I did not love it. I only said it was ugly. It is an open secret that God was less pleased with the sea than with anything else he made. His own people, at least, have always shunned it.

“o, they use it, and several times they have nearly owned it. But they do not go to sea as seamen. In all history there have been only three Jewish seamen. One was in Solomon’s navy; he filled a required berth, and was unhappy. One served a Caliph in the tenth century; why I do not know. And the third was Moysha Uferwohner.”

“Then let us hear about Moysha.”

“Moysha was quite a good man. That is what makes it sad. And the oddest thing is what attracted him to the evil sea. You could not guess it in ten years.”

“Not unless it was a waterfront woman.”

“That is fantastic. Of all unlikely things that would seem the most unlikely. And yet it’s the truth and you hit it at once. Not a woman in being, however, but in potential (as the philosophers have it); which is to say, quite a young girl.

“Likely you have run across her. So I will tell it all.”

This begins ten years ago. Moysha was then a little short of his majority, and was working with his father in an honorable trade not directly connected with the sea, that of the loan shark. But they often loaned money to seamen, a perilous business, for which reason the rates were a little higher than you might expect.

Moysha was making collections and picking up a little new trade. This took him to the smell of the sea, which was painful to him, as to any sensible man. And it took him to the Blue Fish, a water front cafe, bar, and lodging house.

A twelve-year-old girl, a cripple, the daughter of the proprietor, was playing the piano. It was not for some time, due to the primacy of other matters, that Moysha realized that she was playing atrociously. Then he attempted to correct it. “Young lady, one should play well or not at all. Please play better, or stop. That is acutely painful.”

She looked as though she were going to cry, and this disconcerted Moysha, though he did not know why it did. Half an hour later the fact intruded itself on his consciousness that she was still playing, and still playing badly; but now with a stilted sort of badness.

“Young lady, this is past all bearing. I suggest that you stop playing



the damned thing and go to your bed. Or go anywhere and do anything. But this is hideous. Stop it!”

The little girl really did cry then. And as a result of it Moysha got into an altercation, got his head bloodied, and was put out of the place; the first time that such a thing had ever happened to him. Then he realized that the seamen liked the little girl, and liked the way she played the piano.

This does not seem like a good beginning for either a tender love or a great passion. But it had to be the beginning; that was the first time they ever saw each other.

For the next three days Moysha was restless. A serpent was eating at his liver and he could not identify it. He began to take a drink in the middle of the day (it had not been his custom); and on the third day he asked for rum. There was a taste in his mouth and he was trying to match it. And in the inner windings of his head there was an awful smell, and it made him lonesome.

By the evening of the third day the terrible truth came to him: he had to go down for another whiff of that damned sea; and he possibly could not live through another night unless he heard that pretty little girl play the piano again.

Bonny was pretty. She had a wise way with her, and a willful look. It was as though she had just decided not to do something very mean, and was a little sorry that she hadn't.

She didn't really play badly; just out of tune and as nobody else had ever played, with a great amount of ringing in the ballad tunes and a sudden muting, then a sort of clashing and chiming. But she stopped playing when she saw that Moysha was in the room.

Moysha did not get on well at the Blue Fish. He didn't know how to break into the conversation of the seamen, and in his embarrassment he ordered drink after drink. When finally he became quarrelsome (as he had never been before) they put him out of the place again.

Moysha lay on a dirty tarp out on a T head and listened while Bonny played the piano again. Then she stopped. She had probably been sent to bed.

But instead she came out to the T head where he was.

“You old toad, you give me the creeps.

“I do, little girl?”

“Sure you do. And papa says ‘Don’t let that Yehude in the place again, he makes everybody nervous, if someone wants to borrow money from him let them borrow it somewhere else.’ Even the dogs growl at you down here.”

“I know it.”

“Then why do you come here?”

“Tonight is the only time I ever did come except on business.”

“Tonight is what I am talking about.”

“I came down to see you.”

“I know you did, dear. o, I didn’t mean to call you that. I call everybody that.”

“Do you want to take it back?”

“No, I don’t want to take it back. You old toad, why aren’t you a seaman like everybody else?”

“Is everybody else a seaman?”

“Everybody that comes to the Blue Fish. How will you come to the Fish now when Papa won’t let you in the place?”

“I don’t know.”

“If you give me one of your cards I’ll call you up.”

“Here.”

“And if you give me two dollars and a half I’ll pay you back three dollars and a quarter Saturday.”

“Here.”

“I can’t play the piano any other way. If you were a seaman I bet you’d like the way I play the piano. Good night, you old toad.”

“Good night, Bonny.”

And it was then that the dismal thought first came to Moysha: “What if I should be a seaman after all?”

Now this was the most terrible thing he could have done. He could have become a Christian, he could have married a tramp, he could have been convicted of embezzlement. But to leave his old life for the sea would be more than he could stand and more than his family could stand.

And there was no reason for it: only that a twelve-year-old girl looked at him less kindly than if he had been a seaman. It is a terrible and empty thing to go to sea: all order is broken up and there are only periods of debauchery and boredom and work and grinding idleness, and the sickening old pond and its dirty borders. It was for such reasons that

Moysha hesitated for three months.

Bonny came to see him for possibly the tenth time. She was now paying him interest of sixty cents a week on an old debt which, in the normal state of affairs, she would never be able to clear.

“Bonny, I wish there was something that I could say to you.”

“You can say anything you want to me.”

“O Bonny, you don’t know what I mean.”

“You want to bet I don’t?”

“Bonny, what will you be doing in four years?”

“I’ll be getting married to a seaman if I can find one to take me.”

“Why shouldn’t one take you?”

“For a seaman it is bad luck to marry a crippled woman.”

So on the first day of summer Moysha went off to sea as a lowly wiper. It broke his heart and shamed his

family. He woke and slept in misery for the foulness of the life. He ate goy food and sinned in the ports in attempting to be a salty dog. And it was nine weeks before he was back to his home port; and he went to the Blue Fish with some other seamen.

It was afternoon, and Bonny went for a walk with him across the peninsula and down to the beach.

“Well, I’m thunderstruck is all I can say. Why in the world would a sensible man want to go to sea?”

“I thought you liked seamen, Bonny.”

“I do. But how is a man going to turn into a seaman if he isn’t one to start with? A dog could turn into a fish easier. That’s the dumbest thing anyone ever did. I had an idea when you came to the place today that you turned into a seaman just for me. Did you?”

“Yes.”

“I could be coy and say ‘Why Moysha, I’m only twelve years old,’ but I already knew how you felt. I will tell you something. I never did a mean thing, and I never saw anybody I wanted to be mean to till I met you. But I could be mean to you. It would be fun to ruin you. We aren’t good for each other. You oughtn’t to see me ever again.”

“I have to.”

“Then maybe I have to be mean to you. It’s for both of us that I ask you not to see me again. I don’t want to ruin you, and I don’t want to be a mean woman; but I will be if you keep coming around.”

“Well, I can’t stay away.”

“Very well, then I’ll be perverse. I’ll shock you every time I open my mouth. I’ll tell you that I do filthy things, and you won’t know whether I’m lying or not. You won’t know what I mean, and you’ll be afraid to find out. You’ll never be able to stay away from me if you don’t stay away now. I’ll have husbands and still keep you on a string. You’ll stand outside in the dark and look at the light in my window, and you’ll eat your own heart. Please go away. I don’t want to turn mean.”

“But Bonny, it doesn’t have to be that way.”

“I hope it doesn’t, but it scares me every time I see you. Now I’ll make a bargain with you. If you try to stay away I’ll try to stay good. But if you come back again I won’t be responsible. You ought to go back uptown and not try to be a seaman any more.”

After that the little girl went back to the Blue Fish.

Moysha did not go back uptown. He returned to the sea, and he did not visit that port again for a year. And there was a change in him. From closer acquaintance he no longer noticed that the sea was foul. Once at sunset, for a moment, he found something pleasant about it. He no longer sinned excessively in the ports. Ashore he traveled beyond the waterfront bars and visited the countries behind and met the wonderful people. He got the feel of the rough old globe in his head. In a pension in Holland he played chess with another girl, who was not precocious, and who did not dread turning into a mean woman. In a pub in Denmark he learned to take snuff like the saltiest seaman of them all. In an inn in Brittany he was told that the sea is the heritage of the poor who cannot afford the land. It was in Brittany that he first noticed that he now walked like an old salt.

After a year he went back to his home port and to the Blue Fish.

“In a way I’m glad to see you,” said Bonny. “I’ve been feeling contrary lately and you’ll give me an excuse. Every morning I wake up and say ‘This day I’m going to raise hell.’ Then I can’t find anyone to raise hell with. All those water rats I like so well that I can’t be mean to them. But I bet I know how to be mean to you. Well go get a room and tell me where it is, and I’ll come to you tonight.”

“But you’re only a little girl, and besides you don’t mean it.”

“Then you’re going to find out if I mean it. I intend to come. If you think you love me because I’m pretty and good, then I’ll make you love

me for a devil. There's things you don't even know about, and you've been a seaman for a year. I'll make you torture me, and it'll be a lot worse torture to you. I'll show you what unnatural really means. You're going to be mighty sorry you came back."

"Bonny, your humor is cruel."

"When did I ever have any humor? And you don't know if I'm kidding, and you never will know. Would you rather I did these things with someone else than with you?"

"Well I will. If you don't tell me where your room is, I'll go to someone else's room tonight. I'll do things so filthy you wouldn't believe it. And even if I don't go to somebody, I'll tell you tomorrow that I did."

But Moysha would not tell her where his room was. So late that night when he left the Blue Fish she followed him. It was fantastic for a grown man to walk faster and faster to escape a thirteen-year-old crippled girl, and finally to run in panic through the dark streets. But when finally she lost him she cried out with surprising kindness: "Goodnight Moysha, I'm sorry I was mean."

But she wasn't very sorry, for the next night she was still mean.

"You see that old man with the hair in his ears? He's filthy and we don't even understand each other's language. But he understood what I wanted well enough. He's the one I spent last night with."

"Bonny, that's a lie, and it isn't funny."

"I know it isn't funny. But can you be sure that it's a lie? I only he part of the time, and you never know when. Now tonight, if you don't tell me where your room is, I'm going to take either that old red-faced slobberer or that black man. And you can follow me, since you run away when I follow you, and see that I go with one of them. And you can stand out in the street and look up at our light. I always leave the light on."

"Bonny, why are you mean?"

"I wish I knew, Moysha, I wish I knew."

After a week of this he went to sea again, and did not come back to his home port for two years. He learned of the sea-leaning giants.

"I do not know the name of this tree," said Sour John, "though once I knew it. This is the time of a story where one usually says it's time for a drink. However, for a long time I have been worried about my parasites who are to me almost like my own children, and this constant diet of rum and redevye cannot be good for them. I believe if the young lady would fry

me a platter That's the nicest present anyone ever gave me. What do you call him?"

"Why, just a snake. Ular, that is, he's a foreign snake."

So he went back to sea and left the little girl there with the snake in her hands.

Bonny was a widow when she was sixteen, as every-one had known she would be. It's no joke about it being bad luck for a seaman to marry a cripple. They seldom lose much time in perishing after they do it. Oglesby died at sea, as all the Ogburns did; and it was from a trifling illness from which he was hardly sick at all. It was many weeks later that Moysa heard the news, and then he hurried back to his home port.

He was too late. Bonny had married again.

"I thought you'd probably come, and I kind of wanted it to be you. But you waited so long, and the summer was half over, that I decided to marry Polycarp Melish. I'm halfway sorry I did. He wouldn't let Ular sleep with us, and he killed him just because he bit him on the thumb.

"But I tell you what you do. What with the bad luck and all, Polycarp won't last many months. Come around earlier next year. I like to get married in the springtime. I'll be a double widow then."

"Bonny, that's a terrible way to talk even when kidding."

"I'm not kidding at all. I even have an idea how we can beat the jinx. I'll tell you about it after we get married next year. Maybe a crippled girl gets to keep her third husband."

"Do you want Polycarp to die?"

"Of course I don't. I love him. I love all my husbands, just like I'll love you after I marry you. I can't help it if I'm bad luck. I told him, and he said he already knew it; but he wanted to do it anyhow. Will you bring me another snake the next time you're in port?"

"Yes. And you can keep the monkey in place of it till I come back. But you can't have the bird yet. I have to keep someone to talk to."

"All right. Please come in the spring. Don't wait till summer again or it'll be too late and I'll already be married to someone else. But whether we get married or not, I'm never going to be mean again. I'm getting too old for that."

So he went to sea again happier than he ever had before.

When she was seventeen Bonny was a widow again as everyone had known she would be. Polycarp had been mangled and chopped to pieces

in an unusual accident in the engine room of his ship.

Moysha heard of it very soon, before it could have been heard of at home. And he took council with his talking bird, and with one other, technically more human.

“This other,” said Sour John, “was myself. It was very early spring, and Moysha was wondering if it were really best to hurry home and marry Bonny.

“I am not at all superstitious,” he said. “I do not believe that a crippled woman is necessarily bad luck to seamen. But I believe that Bonny may be bad luck to everyone, including herself.”

“We were on a chocolate island of a French flavor and a French name. On it were girls as pretty as Bonny, and without her reputation for bad luck: girls who would never be either wives or widows. And there is a way to go clear around the world from one such place to another.

“The Blue Fish is not necessarily the center of the earth,” I told him. “I have always necessarily believed the to be a little left of center. And Bonny may not be the queen. But if you think that she is, then for you she is so. Nine months, or even a year is not very long to live, and you will be at sea most of the time. But if you think a few weeks with the little girl is enough, then it is enough for you. A lot of others who will not have even that will be dead by next Easter.” I said this to cheer him up. I was always the cheerful type.

“And what do you think?” Moysha asked the talking bird.

“Sampah,” said the bird in his own tongue. This means rubbish. But whether he meant that the superstition was rubbish, or the idea of marrying with a consequent early death was rubbish, is something that is still locked up in his little green head.”

Moysha hurried home to marry Bonny. He brought a brother of Ular for a present, and he went at once to the Blue Fish.

“Well you’re just in time. I was going to have the banns read for me and somebody tomorrow, and if you’d been an hour later it wouldn’t have been you.

“I was halfway afraid to come.”

“You needn’t have been afraid. I told you I knew a way to beat the jinx. I’m selling the Blue Fish. I wrote you that Papa was dead. And we’re going to take a house uptown and forget the sea.”

“Forget the sea? How could anyone forget the sea?”

“Why, you’re only a toy seaman. You weren’t raised to it. When you go away from it you won’t be a seaman at all. And crippled women are only bad luck to seamen, not to other men.”

“But what would I do? The sea is all I know.”

“Don’t be a child, Moysha. You hate the sea, remember? You always told me that you did. You only went to sea because you thought I liked seamen. You know a hundred ways to make a dollar, and you don’t have to go near the sea for any of them.”

So they were married. And they were happy. Moysha discovered that Bonny was really an angel. Her devil talk had been a stunt.

It was worth all five dark years at sea to have her. She was now even more lovely than the first night he had seen her. They lived in a house uptown in the heart of the city, and were an urbane and civilized couple. And three years went by.

Then one day Bonny said that they ought to get rid of the snake, and maybe even the monkey. She was afraid they would bite one of the children, or one of the children would bite them.

The talking bird said that if his friends left he would leave, too.

“But Bonny,” said Moysha, “these three are all that I have to remind me of the years when I was a seaman.

“You have me, also. But why do you want to be reminded of those awful days?”

“I know what we could do, Bonny. We could buy the Blue Fish again. It isn’t doing well. We could live there and run it. And we could have a place there for the snake and the monkey and the bird.”

“Yes, we could have a place for them all, but not for the children. That is no place to raise children. I know, and I was raised there. Now my love, don’t be difficult. Take the three creatures and dispose of them. And remember that for us the sea isn’t even there any more.

But it was still there when he went down to the Blue Fish to try to sell the three creatures to the seaman. An old friend of his was present and was looking for an engineer first class to ship out that very night. And there was a great difficulty in selling the creatures.

He could not sell them unless he put a price on them, and he was damned if he’d do that. That was worse than putting a price on his own children. He had had them longer than his children, and they were more peculiarly his own. He could not sell them. And he could not go home and



tell his wife that he could not sell them.

“He went out and sat on the horns of the dilemma and looked at the sea. And then his old friend (who coincidentally was myself),” said Sour John, “came out and said that he sure did need an engineer first class to leave that very night.

“And then what do you think that Moysha did?”

“O, he signed on and went back to sea.”

Sour John was thunderstruck.

“How did you know that? You’ve hit it again. I never will know how you do it. Well, that’s what he did. In the face of everything he left his beautiful wife and children, and his clean life, and went to the filthy sea again. It’s incredible.”

“And how is he doing now?”

“God knows. I mean it literally. Naturally he’s dead. That’s been a year. You don’t expect a seaman married to a crippled woman to live forever do you?”

“And how is Bonny?”

“I went to see her this afternoon; for this is the port where it all happened. She had out an atlas and a pencil and piece of string. She was trying to measure out what town in the whole country is furthest from the sea.

“She is lonely and grieves for Moysha, more than for either of her other husbands. But o she is lovely! She supports herself and her brood by giving piano lessons.”

“Is there a moral to this?”

“No. It is an immoral story. And it’s a mystery to me. A man will not normally leave a clean home to dwell in an open grave, nor abandon children to descend into a sewer, nor forswear a lovely and loving wife to go faring on a cesspool, knowing that he will shortly die there as a part of the bargain.

“But that is what he did.”

## RAINBIRD

Were scientific firsts truly tabulated the name of the Yankee inventor, Higgston Rainbird, would surely be without peer. Yet today he is known (and only to a few specialists, at that) for an improved blacksmith's bellows in the year 1785, for a certain modification (not fundamental) in the moldboard plow about 1805, for a better (but not good) method of reefing the lateen sail, for a chestnut roaster, for the Devil's Claw Wedge for splitting logs, and for a nutmeg grater embodying a new safety feature; this last was either in the year 1816 or 1817. He is known for such, and for no more.

Were this all that he achieved his name would still be secure. And it is secure, in a limited way, to those who hobby in technological history.

But the glory of which history has cheated him, or of which he cheated himself, is otherwise. In a different sense it is without parallel, absolutely unique.

For he pioneered the dynamo, the steam automobile, the steel industry, ferro-concrete construction, the internal combustion engine, electric illumination and power, the wireless, the televox, the petroleum and petrochemical industries, monorail transportation, air travel, worldwide monitoring, fissionable power, space travel, group telepathy, political and economic balance; he built a retrogressor; and he made great advances towards corporal immortality and the apotheosis of mankind. It would seem unfair that all this is unknown of him.

Even the once solid facts — that he wired Philadelphia for light and power in 1799, Boston the following year, and New York two years later — are no longer solid. In a sense they are no longer facts.

For all this there must be an explanation; and if not that, then an account at least; and if not that, well-something anyhow.

Higgston Rainbird made a certain decision on a June afternoon in 1779 when he was quite a young man, and by this decision he confirmed his inventive bent.

He was hawking from the top of Devil's Head Mounlain. He flew his falcon (actually a tercel hawk) down through the white clouds, and to him it was the highest sport in the world. The bird came back, climbing the blue air, and brought a passenger pigeon from below the clouds. And Higgston was almost perfectly happy as he hooded the hawk.

He could stay there all day and hawk from above the clouds. Or he could go down the mountain and work on his sparker in his shed. He sighed as he made the decision, for no man can have everything. There was a fascination about hawking. But there was also a fascination about the copper-strip sparker. And he went down the mountain to work on it.

Thereafter he hawked less. After several years he was forced to give it up altogether. He had chosen his life, the dedicated career of an inventor, and he stayed with it for sixty-five years.

His sparker was not a success. It would be expensive, its spark was uncertain and it had almost no advantage over flint. People could always start a fire. If not, they could borrow a brand from a neighbor. There was no market for the sparker. But it was a nice machine, hammered copper strips wrapped around iron teased with lodestone, and the thing turned with a hand crank. He never gave it up entirely. He based other things upon it; and the retrogressor of his last years could not have been built without it.

But the main thing was steam, iron, and tools. He made the finest lathes. He revolutionized smelting and mining. He brought new things to power, and started the smoke to rolling. He made mistakes, he ran into dead ends, he wasted whole decades. But one man can only do so much.

He married a shrew, Audrey, knowing that a man cannot achieve without a goad as well as a goal. But he was without issue or disciple, and this worried him.

He built a steamboat and a steamtrain. His was the first steam thresher. He cleared the forests with wood-burning giants, and designed towns. He destroyed southern slavery with a steampowered cotton picker, and power and wealth followed him.

For better or worse he brought the country up a long road, so there was hardly a custom of his boyhood that still continued. Probably no one man had ever changed a country so much in his lifetime.

He fathered a true machine-tool industry, and brought rubber from the tropics and plastic from the laboratory. He pumped petroleum, and used natural gas for illumination and steam power. He was honored and enriched; and, looking back, he had no reason to regard his life as wasted.

“Yes, I’ve missed so much. I wasted a lot of time. If only I could have avoided the blind alleys, I could have done many times as much. I brought machine tooling to its apex. But I neglected the finest tool of all,

the mind. I used it as it is, but I had not time to study it, much less modify it. Others after me will do it all. But I rather wanted to do it all myself. Now it is too late.”

He went back and worked on his old sparker and its descendents, now that he was old. He built toys along the line of it that need not always have remained toys. He made a televox, but the only practical application was that now Audrey could rail at him over a greater distance. He fired up a little steam dynamo in his house, ran wires and made it burn lights in his barn.

And he built a retrogressor.

“I would do much more along this line had I the time. But I’m pepperbellied pretty near the end of the road. It is like finally coming to a gate and seeing a whole greater world beyond it, and being too old and feeble to enter.”

He kicked a chair and broke it.

“I never even made a better chair. Never got around to it. There are so clod-hopping many things I meant to do. I have maybe pushed the country ahead a couple of decades faster than it would otherwise have gone. But what couldn’t I have done if it weren’t for the blind alleys! Ten years lost in one of them, twelve in another. If only there had been a way to tell the true from the false, and to leave to others what they could do, and to do myself only what nobody else could do. To see a link (however unlikely) and to go out and get it and set it in its place. Oh, the waste, the wilderness that a talent can wander in! If I had only had a mentor! If I had had a map, a clue, a hatful of clues. I was born shrewd, and I shrewdly cut a path and went a grand ways. But always there was a clearer path and a faster way that I did not see till later. As my name is Rainbird, if I had it to do over, I’d do it infinitely better.”

He began to write a list of the things that he’d have done better. Then he stopped and threw away his pen in disgust.

“Never did even invent a decent ink pen. Never got around to it. Dog-eared damnation, there’s so much I didn’t do!”

He poured himself a jolt, but he made a face as he drank it.

“Never got around to distilling a really better whiskey. Had some good ideas along that line, too. So many things I never did do. Well, I can’t improve things by talking to myself here about it.”

Then he sat and thought.

“But I burr-tailed can improve things by talking to myself there about it.”

He turned on his retrogressor, and went back sixty-five years and up two thousand feet.

Higgston Rainbird was hawking from the top of Devil’s Head Mountain one June afternoon in 1779. He flew his bird down through the white fleece clouds, and to him it was sport indeed. Then it came back, climbing the shimmering air, and brought a pigeon to him.

“It’s fun,” said the old man, “but the bird is tough, and you have a lot to do. Sit down and listen, Higgston.”

“How do you know the bird is tough? Who are you, and how did an old man like you climb up here without my seeing you? And how in hellpepper did you know that my name was Higgston?”

“I ate the bird and I remember that it was tough. I am just an old man who would tell you a few things to avoid in your life, and I came up here by means of an invention of my own. And I know your name is Higgston, as it is also my name; you being named after me, or I after you, I forget which. Which one of us is the older, anyhow?”

“I had thought that you were, old man. I am a little interested in inventions myself. How does the one that carried you up here work?”

“It begins, well it begins with something like your sparker, Higgston. And as the years go by you adapt and add. But it is all tinkering with a force field till you are able to warp it a little. Now then, you are an ewer-eared galoot and not as handsome as I remembered you; but I happen to know that you have the makings of a fine man. Listen now as hard as ever you listened in your life. I doubt that I will be able to repeat. I will save you years and decades; I will tell you the best road to take over a journey which it was once said that a man could travel but once. Man, I’ll pave a path for you over the hard places and strew palms before your feet.”

“Talk, you addlepatated old gaff. No man ever listened so hard before.”

The old man talked to the young one for five hours. Not a word was wasted; they were neither of them given to wasting words. He told him that steam wasn’t everything, this before he knew that it was anything. It was a giant power, but it was limited. Other powers, perhaps, were not. He instructed him to explore the possibilities of amplification and feedback, and to use always the lightest medium of transmission of power: wire rather than mule-drawn coal cart, air rather than wire, ether

rather than air. He warned against time wasted in shoring up the obsolete, and of the bottomless quicksand of cliché, both of word and of thought.

He admonished him not to waste precious months in trying to devise the perfect apple corer; there will never be a perfect apple corer. He begged him not to build a battery bobsled. There would be things far swifter than a bobsled.

Let others make the new hide scrapers and tanning salts. Let others aid the carter and the candle molder and the cooper in their arts. There was need for a better hame, a better horse block, a better stile, a better whetstone. Well, let others fill those needs. If our button-hooks, our firedogs, our whiffletrees, our bootjacks, our cheese presses are all badly designed and a disgrace, then let someone else remove that disgrace. Let others aid the cordwainer and the cobbler. Let Higgston do only the high work that nobody else would be able to do.

There would come a time when the Carrier himself would disappear, as the fletcher had all but disappeared. But new trades would open for a man with an open mind.

Then the old man got specific. He showed young Higgston a design for a lathe dog that would save time. He told him how to draw, rather than hammer wire; and advised him of the virtues of mica as insulator before other material should come to hand.

“And here there are some things that you will have to take on faith,” said the old man, “things of which we learn the ‘what’ before we fathom the ‘why’.”

He explained to him the shuttle armature and the self-exciting field, and commutation; and the possibilities that anternation carried to its ultimate might open up. He told him a bejammed lot of things about a confounded huge variety of subjects.

“And a little mathematics never hurt a practical man,” said the old gaffer. “I was self-taught, and it slowed me down.”

They hunkered down there, and the old man cyphered it all out in the dust on the top of Devil’s Head Mountain. He showed him natural logarithms and rotating vectors and the calculi and such; hut he didn’t push it too far, as even a smart boy can learn only so much in a few minutes. He then gave him a little advice on the treatment of Audrey, knowing it would be useless, for the art of living with a shrew is a thing

that cannot be explained to another.

“Now hood your hawk and go down the mountain and go to work,” the old man said. And that is what young Higgston Rainbird did.

The career of the Yankee inventor, Higgston Rainbird, was meteoric. The wise men of Greece were little boys to him, the Renaissance giants had only knocked at the door but had not tried the knob. And it was unlocked all the time.

The milestones that Higgston left are breathtaking. He built a short high dam on the flank of Devil’s Head Mountain, and had hydroelectric power for his own shop in that same year (1779). He had an arc light burning in Horse-Head Lighthouse in 1781. He read by true Incandescent light in 1783, and lighted his native village, Knobknocker, three years later. He drove a charcoal fueled automobile in 1787, switched to a distillate of whale oil in 1789, and used true rock oil in 1790. His gasoline powered combination reaper-thresher was in commercial production in 1793, the same year that he wired Centerville for light and power. His first diesel locomotive made its trial run in 1796, in which year he also converted one of his earlier coal burning steamships to liquid fuel.

In 1799 he had wired Philadelphia for light and power, a major breakthrough, for the big cities had manfully resisted the innovations. On the night of the turn of the century he unhooded a whole clutch of new things, wireless telegraphy, the televox, radio transmission and reception, motile and audible theatrical reproductions, a machine to transmit the human voice into print, and a method of sterilizing and wrapping meat to permit its indefinite preservation at any temperature.

And in the spring of that new year he first flew a heavier-than-air vehicle.

“He has made all the basic inventions,” said the many-tongued people. “Now there remains only their refinement and proper utilization.”

“Horse hokey,” said Higgston Rainbird. He made a rocket that could carry freight to England in thirteen minutes at seven cents a hundredweight. This was in 1805. He had fissionable power in 1813, and within four years had the price down where it could be used for desalting seawater to the eventual irrigation of five million square miles of remarkably dry land.

He built a Think Machine to work out the problems that he was too busy to solve, and a Prediction Machine to pose him with new problems

and new areas of breakthrough.

In 1821, on his birthday, he hit the moon with a marker. He bet a crony that he would be able to go up personally one year later and retrieve it. And he won the bet.

In 1830 he first put on the market his Red Ball Pipe Tobacco, an aromatic and expensive crimp cut made of Martian lichen.

In 1836 he founded the Institute for the Atmospheric Rehabilitation of Venus, for he found that place to be worse than a smokehouse. It was there that he developed that hacking cough that stayed with him till the end of his days.

He synthesized a man of his own age and disrepute who would sit drinking with him in the after-midnight hours and say, "You're so right, Higgston, so incontestably right."

His plan for the Simplification and Eventual Elimination of Government was adopted (in modified form) in 1840, a fruit of his Political and Economic Balance Institute.

Yet, for all his seemingly successful penetration of the field, he realized that man was the one truly cantankerous animal, and that Human Engineering would remain one of the never completely resolved fields.

He made a partial breakthrough in telepathy, starting with the personal knowledge that shrews are always able to read the minds of their spouses. He knew that the secret was not in sympathetic reception, but in arrogant break-in. With the polite it is forever impossible, but he disguised this discovery as politely as he could.

And he worked toward corporal immortality and the apotheosis of mankind, that cantankerous animal.

He designed a fabric that would embulk itself on a temperature drop, and thin to an airy sheen in summery weather. The weather itself he disdained to modify, hut he did evolve infallible prediction of exact daily rainfall and temperature for decades in advance.

And he built a retrogressor.

One day he looked in the mirror and frowned.

"I never did get around to making a better mirror. This one is hideous. However (to consider every possibility) let us weigh the thesis that it is the image and not the mirror that is hideous."

He called on an acquaintance.



“Say, Ulois, what year is this anyhow?”

“1844.”

“Are you sure?”

“Reasonably sure.”

“How old am I?”

“Eighty-five, I think, Higgston.”

“How long have I been an old man?”

“Quite a while, Higgston, quite a while.”

Higgston Rainbird hung up rudely.

“I wonder how I ever let a thing like that slip up on me?” he said to himself. “I should have gone to work on corporal immortality a little earlier. I’ve bungled the whole business now.”

He fiddled with his prediction machine and saw that he was to die that very year. He did not seek a finer reading.

“What a saddle-galled splay-footed situation to find myself in! I never got around to a tenth of the things I really wanted to do. Oh, I was smart enough; I just ran up too many blind alleys. Never found the answers to half the old riddles. Should have built the Prediction Machine at the beginning instead of the end. But I didn’t know how to build it at the beginning. There ought to be a way to get more done. Never got any advice in my life worth taking except from that nutty old man on the mountain when I was a young man. There’s a lot of things I’ve only started on. Well, every man doesn’t hang, but every man does come to the end of his rope. I never did get around to making that rope extensible. And I can’t improve things by talking to myself here about it.”

He filled his pipe with Red Ball crimp cut and thought a while.

“But I hill-hopping can improve things by talking to myself there about it.”

Then he turned on his retrogressor and went back and up.

Young Higgston Rainbird was hawking from the top of Devil’s Head Mountain on a June afternoon in 1779. He flew his hawk down through the white clouds, and decided that he was the finest fellow in the world and master of the finest sport. If there was earth below the clouds it was far away and unimportant.

The hunting bird came back, climbing the tall air, with a pigeon from the lower regions.

“Forget the bird,” said the old man, “and give a listen with those

outsized ears of yours. I have a lot to tell you in a very little while, and then you must devote yourself to a concentrated life of work. Hood the bird and clip him to the stake. Is that bridle clip of your own invention? Ah yes, I remember now that it is.”

“I’ll just fly him down once more, old man, and then I’ll have a look at what you’re selling.”

“No. No. Hood him at once. This is your moment of decision. That is a boyishness that you must give up. Listen to me, Higgston, and I will orient your life for you.”

“I rather intended to orient it myself. How did you get up here, old man, without my seeing you? How, in fact, did you get up here at all? It’s a hard climb.”

“Yes, I remember that it is. I came up here on the wings of an invention of my own. Now pay attention for a few hours. It will take all your considerable wit.”

“A few hours and a perfect hawking afternoon will be gone. This may be the finest day ever made.”

“I also once felt that it was, but I man fully gave it up. So must you.”

“Let me fly the hawk down again and I will listen to you while it is gone.”

“But you will only be listening with half a mind, and the rest will be with the hawk.”

But young Higgston Rainbird flew the bird down through the shining white clouds, and the old man began his rigmarole sadly. Yet it was a rang-dang-do of a spiel, a mummywhammy of admonition and exposition, and young Higgston listened entranced and almost forgot his hawk. The old man told him that he must stride half a dozen roads at once, and yet never take a wrong one; that he must do some things earlier than on the alternative had been done quite late; that he must point his technique at the Think Machine and the Prediction Machine, and at the unsolved problem of corporal immortality.

“In no other way can you really acquire elbow room, ample working time. Time runs out and life is too short if you let it take its natural course. Are you listening to me, Higgston?”

But the hawk came back, climbing the steep air, and it had a gray dove. The old man sighed at the interruption, and he knew that his project was in peril.

“Hood the hawk. It’s a sport for boys. Now listen to me, you spraddling jack. I am telling you things that nobody else would ever be able to tell you! I will show you how to fly falcons to the stars, not just down to the meadows and birch groves at the foot of this mountain.”

“There is no prey up there,” said young Higgston.

“There is. Gamier prey than you ever dreamed of. Hood the bird and snaffle him.”

“I’ll just fly him down one more time and listen to you till he comes back.”

The hawk went down through the clouds like a golden bolt of summer lightning.

Then the old man, taking the cosmos, peeled it open layer by layer like an onion, and told young Higgston how it worked. Afterwards he returned to the technological beginning and he lined out the workings of steam and petro- and electromagnetism, and explained that these simple powers must be used for a short interval in the invention of greater power. He told him of waves and resonance and airy transmission, and fission and flight and over-flight. And that none of the doors required keys, only a resolute man to turn the knob and push them open. Young Higgston was impressed.

Then the hawk came back, climbing the towering air, and he had a rainbird.

The old man had lively eyes, but now they took on a new light.

“Nobody ever gives up pleasure willingly,” he said, “and there is always the sneaking feeling that the bargain may not have been perfect. This is one of the things I have missed. I haven’t hawked for sixty-five years. Let me fly him this time, Higgston.”

“You know how?”

“I am adept. And I once intended to make a better gauntlet for hawkers. This hasn’t been improved since Nimrod’s time.”

“I have an idea for a better gauntlet myself, old man.”

“Yes. I know what your idea is. Go ahead with it. It’s practical.”

“Fly him if you want to, old man.”

And old Higgston flew the tercel hawk down through the gleaming clouds, and he and young Higgston watched from the top of the world. And then young Higgston Rainbird was standing alone on the top of Devil’s Head Mountain, and the old man was gone.

“I wonder where he went? And where in apple knocker’s heaven did he come from? Or was he ever here at all? That’s a danged funny machine he came in, if he did come in it. All the wheels are on the inside. But I can use the gears from it, and the clock, and the copper wire. It must have taken weeks to hammer that much wire out that fine. I wish I’d paid more attention to what he was saying, but he poured it on a little thick. I’d have gone along with him on it if only he’d have found a good stopping place a little sooner, and hadn’t been so insistent on giving up hawking. Well, I’ll just hawk here till dark, and if it dawns clear I’ll be up again in the morning. And Sunday, if I have a little time, I may work on my sparker or my chestnut roaster.”

Higgston Rainbird lived a long and successful life. Locally he was known best as a hawker and horse racer. But as an inventor he was recognized as far as Boston.

He is still known, in a limited way, to specialists in the field and period: known as contributor to the development of the moldboard plow, as the designer of the Nonpareil Nutmeg Grater with the safety feature, for a bellows, for a sparker for starting fires (little used), and for the Devil’s Claw Wedge for splitting logs. He is known for such, and for no more.

## DREAM

He was a morning type, so it was unusual that he should feel depressed in the morning. He tried to account for it, and could not.

He was a healthy man, so he ate a healthy breakfast. He was not too depressed for that. And he listened unconsciously to the dark girl with the musical voice. Often she ate at Cahill's in the mornings with her girl friend.

Grape juice, pineapple juice, orange juice, apple juice... why did people look at him suspiciously just because he took four or five sorts of juice for breakfast?

"Agnes, it was ghastly. I was built like a sack. A sackful of skunk cabbage, I swear. And I was a green-brown color and had hair like a latrine mop. Agnes, I was sick with misery. It just isn't possible for anybody to feel so low. I can't shake it at all. And the whole world was like the underside of a log. It wasn't that, though. It wasn't just one bunch of things. It was everything. It was a world where things just weren't worth living. I can't come out of it..."

"Teresa, it was only a dream."

Sausage, only four little links for an order. Did people think he was a glutton because he had four orders of sausage? It didn't seem like very much.

"My mother was a monster. She was a wart-hoggish animal. And yet she was still recognizable. How could my mother look like a wart hog and still look like my mother? Mama's pretty!"

"Teresa, it was only a dream. Forget it."

The stares a man must suffer just to get a dozen pancakes on his plate! What was the matter with people who called four pancakes a tall stack? And what was odd about ordering a quarter of a pound of butter? It was better than having twenty of those little pats each on its coaster.

"Agnes, we all of us had eyes that bugged out. And we stank! We were bloated, and all the time it rained a dirty green rain that smelled like a four-letter word. Good grief, girl! We had hair all over us where we weren't warts. And we talked like cracked crows. We had crawlers. I itch just from thinking about it. And the dirty parts of the dream I won't even tell you. I've never felt so blue in my life. I just don't know how I'll make the day through."

“Teresa, doll, how could a dream upset you so much?”

There isn't a thing wrong with ordering three eggs sunny-side up, and three over easy, and three poached ever so soft, and six of them scrambled. What law says a man should have all of his eggs fixed alike? Nor is there anything wrong with ordering five cups of coffee. That way the girl doesn't have to keep running over with refills.

Bascomb Swicegood liked to have bacon and waffles after the egg interlude and the earlier courses. But he was nearly at the end of his breakfast when he jumped up.

“What did she say?”

He was suprised at the violence of his own voice.

“What did who say, Mr. Swicegood?”

“The girl that was just here, that just left with the other girl.”

“That was Teresa, and the other girl was Agnes. Or else that was Agnes and the other girl was Teresa. It depends on which girl you mean. I don't know what either of them said.”

Bascomb ran out into the street.

“Girl, the girl who said it rained dirty green all the time, what's your name?”

“My name is Teresa. You've met me four times. Every morning you look like you never saw me before.”

“I'm Agnes,” said Agnes.

“What did you mean it rained dirty green all the time? Tell me all about it.”

“I will not, Mr. Swicegood. I was just telling a dream I had to Agnes. It isn't any of your business.”

“Well, I have to hear all of it. Tell me everything you dreamed.”

“I will not. It was a dirty dream. It isn't any of your business. If you weren't a friend of my Uncle Ed Kelly, I'd call a policeman for your bothering me.”

“Did you have things like live rats in your stomach to digest for you? Did they —”

“Oh! How did you know? Get away from me. I will call a policeman. Mr. McCarty, this man is annoying me.”

“The devil he is, Miss Ananias. Old Bascomb just doesn't have it in him any more. There's no more harm in him than a lamppost.”

“Did the lampposts have hair on them, Miss Teresa? Did they pant

and swell and smell green-”

“Oh! You couldn’t know! You awful man!”

“I’m Agnes,” said Agnes; but Teresa dragged Agnes away with her.

“What is the lamppost jag, Bascomb?” asked Officer Mossback McCarty.

“Ah — I know what it is like to be in hell, Mossback. I dreamed of it last night.”

“And well you should, a man who neglects his Easter duty year after year. But the lamppost jag? If it concerns anything on my beat, I have to know about it.”

“It seems that I had the same depressing dream as the young lady, identical in every detail.”

Not knowing what dreams are (and we do not know), we should not find it strange that two people might have the same dream. There may not be enough of them to go around, and most dreams are forgotten in the morning.

Bascomb Swicegood had forgotten his dismal dream. He could not account for his state of depression until he heard Teresa Ananias telling pieces of her own dream to Agnes Schoenapfel. Even then it came back to him slowly at first, but afterwards with a rush.

The oddity wasn’t that two people should have the same dream, but that they should discover the coincidence, what with the thousands of people running around and most of the dreams forgotten.

Yet, if it were a coincidence, it was a multiplex one. On the night when it was first made manifest it must have been dreamed by quite a number of people in one medium-large city. There was a small piece in an afternoon paper. One doctor had five different worried patients who had had dreams of rats in their stomachs, and hair growing on the insides of their mouths. This was the first publication of the shared-dream phenomenon.

The squib did not mention the foul-green-rain back-ground, but later investigation uncovered that this and other details were common to the dreams.

But it was a reporter named Willy Wagoner who really put the town on the map. Until he did the job, the incidents and notices had been isolated. Doctor Herome Judas had been putting together some notes on the Green-rain Syndrome. Doctor Florenz Appian had been working up

his evidence on the Surex Ventriculus Trauma, and Professor Gideon Greathouse had come to some learned conclusions on the inner meaning of warts. But it was Willy Wagoner who went to the people for it, and then gave his conclusions back to the people.

Willy said that he had interviewed a thousand people at random. (He hadn't really; he had talked to about twenty. It takes longer than you might think to interview a thousand people.) He reported that slightly more than sixty-seven percent had had a dream of the same repulsive world. He reported that more than forty-four percent had had the dream more than once, thirty two percent more than twice, twenty-seven percent more than three times. Many had had it every damned night. And many refused frostily to answer questions on the subject at all.

This was ten days after Bascomb Swicegood had heard Teresa Ananias tell her dream to Agnes.

Willy published the opinions of the three learned gentlemen above, and the theories and comments of many more. He also appended a hatful of answers he had received that were sheer levity.

But the phenomenon was not local. Wagoner's article was the first comprehensive (or at least wordy) treatment of it, but only by hours. Similar things were in other papers that very afternoon, and the next day.

It was more than a fad. Those who called it a fad fell silent after they themselves experienced the dream. The suicide index rose around the country and the world. The thing was now international. The cacophonous ditty Green Rain was on all the jukeboxes, as was The Wart Hog Song. People began to loath themselves and each other. Women feared that they would give birth to monsters. There were new perversions committed in the name of the thing, and several orgiastic societies were formed with the stomach rat as a symbol. All entertainment was forgotten, and this was the only topic.

Nervous disorders took a fearful rise as people tried to stay awake to avoid the abomination, and as they slept in spite of themselves and suffered the degradation.

It is no joke to experience the same loathsome dream all night every night. It had actually come to that. All the people were dreaming it all night every night. It had passed from being a joke to being a universal menace. Even the sudden new millionaires who rushed their cures to the market were not happy. They also suffered whenever they slept, and they



knew that their cures were not cures.

There were large amounts posted for anyone who could cure the populace of the wart-hog-people dreams. There was presidential edict and dictator decree, and military teams attacked the thing as a military problem, but they were not able to subdue it.

Then one night a nervous lady heard a voice in her noisome dream. It was one of the repulsive cracked wart-hog voices. "You are not dreaming," said the voice. "This is the real world. But when you wake you will be dreaming. That barefaced world is not a world at all. It is only a dream. This is the real world." The lady awoke howling. And she had not howled before, for she was a demure lady.

Nor was she the only one who awoke howling. There were hundreds, then thousands, then millions. The voice spoke to all and engendered a doubt. Which was the real world? Almost equal time was now spent in each, for the people had come to need more sleep and most of them had arrived at spending a full twelve hours or more in the nightmarish world.

"It Could Be" was the title of a headlined article on the subject by the same Professor Greathouse mentioned above. It could be, he said, that the world on which the green rain fell incessantly was the real world. It could be that the wart-hogs were real and the people a dream. It could be that rats in the stomach were normal, and other methods of digestion were chimerical.

And then a very great man went on the air in worldwide broadcast with a speech that was a ringing call for collective sanity. It was the hour of decision, he said. The decision would be made. Things were at an exact balance, and the balance would be tipped.

"But we can decide. One way or the other, we will decide. I implore you all in the name of sanity that you decide right. One world or the other will be the world of tomorrow. One of them is real and one of them is a dream. Both are with us now, and the favor can go to either. But listen to me here: whichever one wins, the other will have always been a dream, a momentary madness soon forgotten. I urge you to the sanity which in a measure I have lost myself. Yet in our darkened dilemma I feel that we yet have a choice. Choose!"

And perhaps that was the turning point.

The mad dream disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. The world came back to normal with an embarrassed laugh. It was all over. It

had lasted from its inception six weeks.

Bascomb Swicegood, a morning type, felt excellent this morning. He breakfasted at Cahill's, and he ordered heavily as always. And he listened with half an ear to the conversation of two girls at the table next to his.

"But I should know you," he said.

"Of course. I'm Teresa."

"I'm Agnes," said Agnes.

"Mr. Swicegood, how could you forget? It was when the dreams first came, and you overheard me telling mine to Agnes. Then you ran after us in the street because you had had the same dream, and I wanted to have you arrested. Weren't they horrible dreams? And have they ever found out what caused them?"

"They were horrible, and they have not found out. They ascribe it to group mania, which is meaningless. And now there are those who say that the dreams never came at all, and soon they will be nearly forgotten. But the horror of them! The loneliness!"

"Yes, we hadn't even pediculi to curry our body hair. We almost hadn't any body hair."

Teresa was an attractive girl. She had a cute trick of popping the smallest rat out of her mouth so it could see what was coming into her stomach. She was bulbous and beautiful. "Like a sackful of skunk cabbage," Bascomb murmured admiringly in his head, and then flushed green at his forwardness of phrase.

Teresa had protuberances upon protuberances and warts on warts, and hair all over her where she wasn't warts and bumps. "Like a latrine mop!" sighed Bascomb with true admiration. The cracked clang of Teresa's voice was music in the early morning.

All was right with the earth again. Gone the hideous nightmare world when people had stood barefaced and lonely, without bodily friends or dependents. Gone that ghastly world of the sick blue sky and the near absence of entrancing odor.

Bascomb attacked manfully his plate of prime carrion. And outside the pungent green rain fell incessantly.

## SODOM AND GOMORRAH, TEXAS

Manuel shouldn't have been employed as a census taker. He wasn't qualified. He couldn't read a map. He didn't know what a map was. And he only grinned when they told him that North was at the top. He knew better.

But he did write a nice round hand — like a boy's hand. He did know Spanish, and enough English. For the sector that was assigned to him, he would not need a map. He knew it better than anyone else, certainly better than any mapmaker.

Besides, he was poor and needed the work.

They instructed him and sent him out. Or they thought that they had instructed him. They couldn't be sure.

"Count everyone? All right. Fill them all in? I need more papers.

"We will give you more papers if you need more, Manuel, but there aren't so many in your sector."

"Lots of them, lobos, tejones, zorros, even people."

"People only, Manuel. Do not take the animals. How would you write them up? They have no names."

"Oh, yes. All have names. Might as well take them all."

"Only people, Manuel."

"Mulos?"

"No."

"Conejos?"

"No, Manuel, no."

"No trouble. Might as well take them all."

"Only people — God give me strength! — only people, Manuel."

"How about little people?"

"Children, yes, that has been explained to you."

"Little people. Not children. Little people."

"If they are people, take them."

"How big they have to be?"

"It doesn't make any difference how big they are. If they are people, take them."

Manuel took Mula and went. His sector was the Santa Magdalena — a scarp of baldheaded and desolate mountains, steep hut not high, and so torrid in the afternoons that it was said that the old lava sometimes began

to writhe arid flow again from the sun's heat alone.

In the Center Valley, there were five thousand acres of slag and glassified rock from some forgotten old blast that had melted the hills and destroyed their mantle, reducing all to a terrible flatness. This was Sodom-strewn with low-lying ghosts as of people and objects, formed when the granite bubbled like water.

Away from the dead center, the ravines were body-deep in chapparal, and the mountains stood gray-green in old cactus. The stunted trees were lower than the giant bushes and yuccas.

Manuel went with Mula — a round easy man and a spare gaunt mule. Mula was a mule, but there were other inhabitants of the Santa Magdalena whose genus was less certain.

Yet even about Mula there was an ancestral oddity. 11cr paternal grandfather had been a goat. Manuel once told Mr. Marshal about this, but Marshal had not accepted it.

“She is a mule,” he said. “Therefore, her father was a jack. Therefore his father was also a jack, a donkey. It could not be any other way, Manuel.”

Manuel often wondered about this, for he had raised the whole strain of animals and he remembered who had been with whom.

“A donkey! A jack! Two feet tall, and with a beard and horns! I always thought he was a goat.”

Manuel and Mula stopped at noon on Lost Soul Creek. There would be no travel in the hot afternoon. But Manuel had a job to do and he did it. He took the forms from one of the packs that he had unslung from Mula and counted out nine of them. He wrote down all the data on nine people. He knew all there was to know about them — their nativities and their antecedents. He knew that there were only nine regular people in the nine hundred square miles of the Santa Magdalena.

But he was systematic, so he checked the list over again and again. There seemed to be somebody missing. Oh yes, himself. He got another form and filled out all the data on himself.

Now — in one way of looking at it — his part in the census was finished. If only he had looked at it that way, he would have saved worry and trouble for everyone, and also ten thousand lives. But the instructions they had given him were ambiguous, for all that they had tried to make them clear.

So very early the next morning, Manuel rose and cooked bean and said, “Might as well take them all.”

He called Mula from the thorn patch where she was grazing and gave her salt and loaded her again. Then they went to take the rest of the census — but in fear. There was a clear duty to get the job done, but there was also a dread of it that the superiors did not understand. There was reason also why Mula was loaded with packs of census forms till she could hardly walk.

Manuel prayed out loud as they climbed the purgatorial scarp above Lost Soul Creek “— ruega por nosotros pecadores ahora” — the very gulches stood angry and stark in the hot early morning — “y en la hora de nuestra muerte.”

Three days later an incredible dwarf staggered into the outskirts of High Plains, Texas. He was followed by a dying wolf-sized animal that did not look like a wolf.

A lady called the police to save the pair from rock-throwing kids who would have killed them; and the two as yet unclassified things were taken to the station house.

The dwarf was three feet high—a skeleton stretched over with brown-burnt leather. The other was an uncanine looking dog-sized beast so full of burs and thorns that it might have been a porcupine. But it was more a nightmare replica of a shrunken mule.

The midget was mad. The animal had more presence of mind; she lay down quietly and died. That was all she could do considering the state she was in.

“Who is census chief now?” asked the mad midget. “Is Mr. Marshal’s little boy the census chief?”

“Mr. Marshal is, yes. Who are you? How do you know of Marshal? And what is that which you are pulling out of your pants — if they are pants?”

“Census list. Names of everyone in town. I had to steal it.”

“It looks like microfilm—the writing is so small. And the roll goes on and on. There must be a million names here.”

“Little bit more, little bit more. I get two bits a name.” They got Marshal there. He was very busy, but he came. He had been given a deadline by the mayor and the citizen’s group. He had to produce a population of ten thousand persons for High Plains, Texas. This was

difficult, for there weren't that many people in the town. He had been working hard on it, though. But he came when the police called him.

"You Marshal's little boy?" the mad midget asked him. "You look just like your father."

"That voice — I should know that voice even if it's cracked to pieces," said Marshall. "That has to be Manuel's voice."

"Sure, I'm Manuel, just like when I left thirty-five years ago."

"You can't be Manuel — shrunk three feet and two hundred pounds and aged a million."

"You look here at my census slip, Mr. Marshal. It says I'm Manuel. And here are nine more of the regular people, and one million of the little people. I couldn't get the little ones on the regular forms. I had to steal their list."

"You can't be Manuel," said Marshal.

"He can't be Manuel," said the big policemen and the little policemen.

"Maybe not then. I thought I was. Who am I then? Let's look at the other papers to see which one I am."

"No, you can't be any of them either, Manuel. And you surely can't be Manuel."

"Give him a name anyhow and get him counted," said the head of the citizens' group. "We got to get to that ten thousand mark."

"Tell us what happened, Manuel — if you are — which you aren't — but tell us."

"After I counted the regular people, I went to count the little people. I took a spade and spaded the top off their town to get in. But they put an encanto on me and made me and Mula run a treadmill for thirty-five years."

"Where was this, Manuel?"

"At the Little People Town — Nuevo Danae. But after thirty-five years, the encanto wore off, and Mula and I stole the list of names and ran away."

"But where did you really get this list of so many names written so small, Manuel?"

"Suffering saddle sores, Marshal, don't ask the little bug so many questions! You got a million names in your hand. Certify them! Send them in! There's enough of us right here to pass a resolution. We declare that place annexed forthwith. This will make High Plains the biggest town

in Texas.”

So Marshal certified the names and sent them in to Washington. This gave High Plains the largest percent increase of any city in the nation — but it was challenged. There were some soreheads in Houston who said that it wasn’t possible — that High Plains had nowhere near that many people and that there must have been a miscount.

In the days that the argument was going on, they cleaned up and fed Manuel — if it were he — and tried to get from him a cogent story.

“How do you know it was thirty-five years, Manuel?”

“On the treadmill, it seemed like thirty-five years.”

“It could have been only about three days.”

“How come I’m so old then?”

“We don’t know that Manuel. We sure don’t know that. How big were these people?”

“Who knows. A finger long, maybe two.”

“And what is their town?”

“It’s an old prairie dog town that they fixed up. You have to dig down with a spade to get to the streets.”

“Maybe they really were prairie dogs, Manuel. Maybe the heat got you and you only dreamed that they were little people.”

“Prairie dogs can’t write as good as on that list,” said Manuel. “Prairie dogs can’t write hardly at all.”

“That’s true. The list is hard to explain. And such odd names on it, too.”

“Where is Mula? I don’t see Mula since I came back.”

“Mula just lay down and died, Manuel.”

“Gave me the slip. Why didn’t I think of that? I’ll do it too. I’m too worn out for anything else.”

“Before you do, Manuel, just a couple of last questions.”

“Make them real fast then. I’m on my way.”

“Did you know there little people were there before?”

“Oh sure. Everybody in the Santa Magdalena see them. Eight, nine people know they are there. ‘Who wants to be laughed at?’ they say. They never talked about it.”

“And, Manuel, how do we get to the place? Can you show us on a map?”

Manuel made a grimace and died quietly. He didn’t understand those

maps, and he took the easy way out. They buried him — not knowing for sure whether he was Manuel or not. There wasn't much of him to bury.

It was the same night — very late, and after he had been asleep — that Marshal was awakened by the ring of an authoritative voice. He was being harangued by a four-inch-tall man on his bedside table — a man of dominating presence and acid voice.

“Come out of that cot, you clown! Give me your name and station!”

“I'm marshal, and I suspect that you're a late pig sandwich. I shouldn't eat so late.”

“Say ‘Sir’ when you reply to me! I am no pig sandwich and I do not commonly call on fools. Get on your feet, you clod!” Wondering, Marshal did.

“I want the list that was stolen. Don't gape. Get it! Don't stall, don't stutter. Get me that tax list! It isn't words I want from you.

“Listen, you cicada,” said Marshal with his last bravery, “I'll take you and —”

“You will not! You will notice that you are now paralyzed from the neck down. I suspect that you were always so from there up. Where is it?”

“S — sent it to Washington.”

“You bug-eyed behemoth! Do you realize what a trip that will be? You grandfather of inanities, it will be a pleasure to destroy you.

“I don't know what you are,” said Marshal. “I don't believe you even belong on the world.”

“Not belong on the world? We own the world. We can show written title to the world. Can you?”

“I doubt it. Where did you get the title?”

“We got it from a promoter of sorts, a con man really. I have to admit that we were taken, but we were in a spot and needed a world. He said that the larger bifurcates were too stupid to be a nuisance. We should have known that the stupider the creature the more of a nuisance it is.”

“I have decided the same thing about the smaller the creature. We may have to fumigate that old mountain mess.”

“Oh, you can't harm us. We're too powerful. But we can obliterate you in an instant.

“Hah!” exploded Marshal.

“Say ‘hah, sir’ when you address me. Do you know the place in the mountain that is called Sodom?”



“I know the place. It was caused by a large meteor.”

“It was caused by one of these,” said the small creature, and what he held up was the size of a grain of sand. “There was another city of you bug-eyed beasts there,” continued the small martinet. “You wouldn’t know about it. It’s been a few hundred years. We decided it was too close. Now I have decided that you are too close.”

“A thing that size couldn’t crack a walnut,” said Marshal.

“You floundering fop, it will blast this town flat.”

“And if it does, what will happen to you?”

“Nothing. I don’t even blink for things like that. I haven’t time to explain it to you, you gaping goof. I have to get to Washington.”

It may be that Marshal did not believe himself quite awake. He certainly didn’t take the threat seriously enough. For, in a manner still not understood, the little man did trigger it off.

When the final count was in, High Plains did not have the highest percentage gain in the Nation. Actually it showed the sharpest decline of any town — from 7313 to nothing. It is believed that High Plains was destroyed by a giant meteor. But there are eight, nine people in the Santa Magdalena who know what really happened, and they won’t tell.

They were going to make a forest preserve out of the place, except that it has no trees worthy of the name. Now it is proposed to make it the Sodom and Gomorrah State Park from the two mysterious scenes of desolation there just seven miles apart.

It is an interesting place, as wild a region as you will ever find, and is recommended for the man who has seen everything.

## THE TRANSCENDENT TIGERS

This was the birthday of Carnadine Thompson. She was seven years old. Thereby she left her childhood behind her, and came into the fullness of her powers. This was her own phrase, and her own idea of the importance of the milestone.

There were others, mostly adult, who thought that she was a peculiarly backward little girl in some ways, though precocious in others.

She received for her birthday four presents: a hollow, white rubber ball, a green plastic frog, a red cap and a little wire puzzle.

She immediately tore the plastic frog apart, considering it a child's toy. So much for that.

She put on the cap, saying that it had been sent by her Genie as a symbol of her authority. In fact none of them knew who had sent her the red cap. The cap is important. If it weren't important, it wouldn't be mentioned.

Carnadine quickly worked the wire puzzle, and then unworked it again. Then she did something with the hollow, white rubber ball that made her mother's eyes pop out. Nor did they pop all the way in again when Carnadine undid it and made it as it was before.

Geraldine Thompson had been looking pop-eyed for a long time. Her husband had commented on it, and she had been to the doctor for it. No medical reason was found, but the actual reason was some of the antics of her daughter Carnadine.

"I wonder if you noticed the small wire puzzle that I gave to my daughter," said Tyburn Thompson to his neighbor, H. Horn.

"Only to note that it probably cost less than a quarter," said Horn, "and to marvel again at the canny way you have with coin. I wouldn't call you stingy, Tyburn. I've never believed in the virtues of understatement. You have a talent for making stingy people seem benevolent."

"I know. Many people misunderstand me. But consider that wire puzzle. It's a very simple-appearing puzzle, but it's twenty-four centuries old. It is unworkable, of course, so it should keep Carnadine occupied for some time. She has an excess of energy. This is one of the oldest of the unworkable puzzles."

"But, Tyburn, she just worked it," said his wife Geraldine.

"It is one of the nine impossible apparatus puzzles listed by

Anaximandros in the fifth century before the common era,” continued Tyburn. “And do you know, in all the centuries since then, there have been only two added to the list.”

“Carnadine,” said her mother, “let me see you work that again.”

Carnadine worked it again.

“The reason it is unworkable,” said Tyburn, “though apparent to me as a design engineer, may not be so readily apparent to you. It has to do with odds and evens of lays. Many of the unworkable classic puzzles are cordage puzzles, as is this actually. It is a wire miniature of a cordage puzzle. It is said that this is the construction of the Gordian knot. The same, however, is said of two other early cordage puzzles.”

“But she just worked it, Tyburn, twice,” said the wife.

“Stop chattering, Geraldine. I am explaining something to Horn. Men have spent years on the puzzle, the Engineering Mind and the recognition of patent impossibility being less prevalent in past centuries. And this, I believe, is the best of all the impossible ones. It is misleading. It looks as though there would surely be a way to do it.”

“I just believe that I could do it, Tyburn,” said Horn.

“No, you could not. You’re a stubborn man, and it’d drive you crazy. It’s quite impossible. You would have to take it into another dimension to work it, and then bring it back.”

Carnadine once more did something with the hollow rubber ball.

“How did you make the rubber ball turn red and then white again, Carnadine?” her mother asked her.

“Turned it inside out. It’s red on the inside.”

“But how did you turn it inside out without tearing it?”

“It’d spoil it to tear it, mama.”

“But it’s impossible to turn it inside out without tearing it.”

“Not if you have a red cap it isn’t.”

“Dear, how do you work the puzzle that your father says can’t be worked?”

“Like this.”

“Oh, yes. I mean, how does it happen that you can work it when nobody else could ever work it before?”

“There has to be a first time for everything, mama.”

“Maybe, but there has to be a first-class explanation to go with that first time.”

“It’s on account of the red cap. With this cap I can do anything.”

So Carnadine Thompson in the fullness of her powers, and in her red cap, went out to find the rest of the Bengal Tigers. This was the most exclusive society in the world. It had only one full member, herself, and three contingent or defective members, her little brother Eustace, Fatty Frost, and Peewee Horn. Children all three of them, the oldest not within three months of her age.

The Bengal Tigers was not well known to the world at large, having been founded only the day before. Carnadine Thompson was made First Stripe for life. There were no other offices.

Yet, for a combination of reasons, the Bengal Tigers now became the most important society in the world. The new power was already in being. It was only a question of what form it would take, but it seemed to show a peculiar affiliation for this esoteric society.

Clement Chardin, writing in *Bulletin de la Societe’ Parahistorique Francaise*, expressed a novel idea:

It is no longer a question whether there be transcendent powers. These have now come so near to us that the aura of them ruffles our very hair. We are the objects of a visitation. The Power to Move Mountains and Worlds is at hand. The Actuality of the Visitation is proved, though the methods of the detection cannot now be revealed.

The question is only whether there is any individual or group with the assurance to grasp that Power. It will not be given lightly. It will not come to the craven or contabescent. There is the sad possibility that there may be none ready in the World to receive the Power. This may not be the first Visitation, but it may well be the last. But the Power, whatever its form and essence (it is real, its presence had been detected by fine instrumentation), the Power, the Visitation may pass us by as unworthy.

This parenthetical for those who might not have read it in the journal.

That which struck just West of Kearney, Nebraska, was an elemental force. The shock of it was heard around the world, and its suction flattened farmhouses and barns for miles.

The area of the destruction was an almost perfect circle about two miles in diameter, so just over two thousand acres were destroyed. The first reports said that it was like no disaster ever known. Later reports said that it was like every disaster ever known; and it did have points of resemblance to all.

There was the great crater as though a meteorite had struck; there was the intense heat and the contamination as though it had been of fissionable origin; there was an afterflow of lava and the great ash clouds as though it were the super volcanic explosion of another Krakatoa. There was the sudden silence of perhaps two seconds actually, and perhaps two hours as to human response. And then the noise of all sorts.

The early reports said that the hole was three miles deep. That was said simply to have a figure and to avoid panic. It was not known how deep the hole was.

But it was very much more than three miles — before the earthquake had begun to fill and mask it — before the hot magma had oozed up from its bottom to fill those first miles. It was still very much more than three miles deep after the rapid gushing had declined to a slow waxlike flowing.

Had anyone heard the preceding rush, or seen a meteor or any other flying object? No. There hadn't been a sound, but there had been something pitched a little higher than sound.

There hadn't been a meteor or a flying ball. But there had been what some called a giant shaft of light, and others a sheen of metal: a thing too big to be believed, and gone too soon to be remembered.

One farmer said that it was like the point of a giant needle quickly becoming more than a mile thick, and a hundred thousand miles long.

Did he know how to judge distances? Certainly, he said, I know how to judge distances. It is ninety yards to that tree; it is seven hundred yards to that windmill. That crow is flying at right onto eighty yards above the earth, though most would guess him higher. And that train whistle is coming from a distance of five and one-quarter miles.

But did he know how to judge great distances? Did he know how far was a hundred thousand miles? Certainly, he said, a great distance is easier to judge than a small one. And that sudden bright shaft was one hundred thousand miles long.

The farmer was the only one who offered any figures. Few had seen the thing at all. And all who had seen it maintained that it had lasted only a fraction of a second.

“There should be something to take the minds of the people from the unexplained happening near Kearney, Nebraska,” said a group of advisors who had national status. “It will not be good for too much notice to be taken of this event until we have an explanation of it.”

Fortunately something did take the minds of the people off the unexplained happenings near Kearney. What took their minds from the unusual happenings in Nebraska were the happenings at or near Hanksville, Utah, Crumpton, Maryland, Locust Bayou, Arkansas, and Pope City, Georgia. All of these sudden destructions were absolutely similar in type and vague in origin. National panic now went into the second stage, and it was nearly as important to halt it as to solve the disasters them selves.

And what in turn took the minds of the people off these disasters were the further disasters at Highmore, South Dakota, Lower Gilmore, New Hampshire, Cherryfork, Ohio, and Rowesville, South Carolina.

And what took the minds of the people off these later disasters were still further disasters at — but this could go on and on.

And it did.

So with the cataclysmic disasters erupting over the country like a rash, there wasn't a large audience for the academic discussions about the New Potential of Mankind. There were those, concerned about the current catastrophes, who said that Mankind might not last long enough to receive the New Potential — or anything else.

But Winkers observed from the Long Viewpoint — paying no more attention to the destructions than if they had been a string of firecrackers, such not being his field:

It is paradoxical that we know so much and yet so little about the Power Immanent in the World: the Visitation, the Poyavlenie, as it is now called internationally.

It has been detected, but in ways twice removed. An earlier statement that it had been detected by instrumentation is inaccurate. It has not been detected by instrumentation, but by para-instrumentation. This is the infant science of gathering data from patterns of failure of instruments, and of making deductions from those failure patterns. What our finest instruments fail to detect is at least as important as what they do detect. In some cases it is more so. The patterns of failure when confronted with the thesis of the Visitation have been varied, but they have not been random. There appears to be a validity to the deductions from the patterns.

The characteristics of the Power, the Visitation, as projected by these methods (and always considered in the Oeg-Hornbostel framework) is

that it is Aculciform, Hoinodynamous, Homochiral, and (here the intelligence reels with disbelief, yet I assure the Jector that I am deadly serious) Homoeoteleutic.

For there is a Verbal Element to it, incredible as it seems. This raises old ghosts. It is almost as if we hear the returning whisper of primitive magic or fetish. It is as if we were dealing with the Logos — the word that was before the world. But where are we to find the logic of the Logos?

Truly the most puzzling aspect of all is this Verbal Element detected in it, even if thus remotely. Should we believe that the Power operates homeopathically through some sort of witches' rhyming chant? That might be an extreme conclusion, since we know it only by an implication. But when we consider all the foregoing in the light of Lauder milk's Hypothesis, we are tempted to a bit of unscientific apprehension.

How powerful is the Power? We do not know. We cannot equate it in dynes. We can only compare effect with effect, and here the difference is so great that comparison fails. We can consider the effect of the Titter-Stumpf Theory, or of the Krogman-Keil Projection on Instrumentation and Para-instrumentation. And we humbly murmur "very powerful indeed."

Carnadine Thompson had begun to read the newspapers avidly. This was unexpected, since reading was her weak point. She had had so much trouble with the story of the Kitten and the Bell in the First Reader that her mother had come to believe that she had no verbal facility at all. This had been belied a moment later when Carnadine had torn the offending pages out of the Reader and told her mother and the world just what they could do with that kitten, and told it with great verbal facility. But it seemed that for reading Carnadine had no talent.

But now she read everything she could find about the new disasters that had struck the country — read it out loud in a ringing voice in which the names of the destroyed places were like clanging bells.

"How come you can read the paper so well, Carnadine?" her mother asked her. "How do you know how to say the names?"

"Oh, it's no great trick, mama. You just tie into the stuff and let go. Crumpton! Locust Bayou! Pope City! Cherryfork! Rowesville!"

"But how can you read all those hard names in the paper when you couldn't even read the story about the little kitten?"

"Mama, with things going the way they are, I think there's a pretty

good chance that that damned kitten will get what's coming to her."

Far out, very far out, there was a conversation.

This was on a giant world of extreme sophistication nondependence on matter. It was such a world as which Lauder milk's Hypothesis was built. That such a world existed, even in a contingent sense, was a triumph for Lauder milk.

"Then you have invested one?" asked Sphaeros, an ancient rotundity of that advanced world.

"I have invested one," said Acu, the eager young sharpie, and bowed his forehead to the floor. The expression was figurative, since there was neither forehead nor floor on that world.

"And you are certain that you have invested the correct one?"

"You toy with me. Naturally I am not certain. Every investiture may not be successful, and every seed may not grow. One learns by experience, and this is my first experience on such a mission.

"I examined much of that world before I found this person. I thought first that it would be among the masters of the contrapuntal worlds — for even there they have such and masters of such. But none of these persons — called by themselves actors and impresarios and promoters and hacks — none of these qualified. None had the calm assurance that is the first requisite. What assurance they had was of another sort, and not valid. Also, their contrapuntal worlds were not true creations in our sense — not really worlds at all."

"Then where did you look?" asked Sphaeros.

"I looked to the heads of the apparatus. On retarded worlds there is often an apparatus or 'government.' On that world there were many. But the leaders of these-though most showed an avidity for power-did not show the calm assurance that should go with it. Their assurance, if it could be called such, was of an hysterical sort. Also, most of them were venal persons, so I rejected them."

"And then?"

"Then I explored remote possibilities. Those who employ in their work a certain power over another species — jockeys, swineherds, beekeepers, snake-charmers. But with them I didn't find what I looked for — the perfect assurance of the truly superior being."

"And then, Acu?"

"Then I went into instruments, not trusting my own judgment. I set



the Calm Assurance Indicator on automatic and cruised about that world. And on that whole world I found only one person with perfect assurance — one impervious to doubt of any kind and totally impervious to self-doubt. On this one I made the investiture and conferred the concept of great Power and Sharpness.

“You have made a mistake. Fortunately it is not a great mistake as it is not a great world. You were too anxious to make a good showing on your first attempt. When nothing can be found, you should leave that world alone. On very many of them nothing can be found. Assurance is not the only quality that makes up this competence; it is simply the quality for which we look first on alien spheres.

“The one on whom you made the Investiture, though full of assurance, was not full of other qualities equally important. It was in fact a pupa form, a child of the species, known locally as a kid. Well, it’s done and cannot be undone. Fortunately such power conferred carries its own safety factor. The worst it can do is destroy its own world and seal it off safely from others. You made the Investiture correctly?”

“Yes. I left the Red Cap, the symbol of authority and power. There was instant acceptance and comprehension.”

“Now we’ll do the big towns,” screamed Carnadine Thompson in the clubhouse of the Bengal Tigers.

“Peas and Beans — New Orleans!”

She jabbed the needle into New Orleans on the map, and the great shaft a hundred thousand miles long came down into the middle of the Crescent City.

A needle? Not a pin? No. No. Pins won’t work. They’re of base metal. Needles! Needles!

“Candy store — Baltimore,” howled Carnadine and jabbed in another needle, and the old city was destroyed. But there was never a place that screamed so loudly over its own destruction or hated so much to go.

“Fatty’s full of bolonio —  
San Antonio.”

And Carnadine stuck it in with full assurance of her powers, red cap atilt, eyes full of green fire. There were some of us who liked that place and wished that it could have been spared.

“Eustace is a sisty — Corpus Christi.”

“I know one,” said Eustace, and he clapped the red cap on his own

head:

“Eggs and Batter — Cincinnater.”

He rhymed and jabbed, manfully but badly.

“That didn’t rhyme very good,” said Carnadine. “I bet you botched it.”

He did. It wasn’t a clean-cut holocaust at all. It was a clumsy, bloody, grinding job — not what you’d like.

“Eustace, go in the house and get the big world map,” ordered Carnadine, “and some more needles. We don’t want to run out of things.”

“Pee wee is a sapolis — Minneapolis.”

“Let me do one,” pleaded Peewee, and he snatched the red cap:

“Hopping Froggo — Chicago.”

“I do wish that you people would let me handle this,” said Carnadine. “That was awful.”

It was. It was horrible. That giant needle didn’t go in clean at all. It buckled great chunks of land and tore a ragged gap. Nothing pretty, nothing round about it. It was plain brutal destruction.

If you don’t personally go for this stuff, then pick a high place near a town that nobody can find a rhyme for, and go there fast. But if you can’t get out of town in the next two minutes, then forget it. It will be too late.

Carnadine plunged ahead:

“What the hecktady — Schenectady.”

That was one of the roundest and cleanest holes of all.

“Flour and Crisco — San Francisco.”

That was a good one. It got all the people at once, and then set up tidal waves and earthquakes all over everywhere.

“Knife and Fork —

## MAD MAN

The too-happy puppy came bounding up to him — a bundle of hysterical yipes and a wagging tail that would bring joy to the soul of anyone. The pathetic expectation and sheer love in the shining eyes and woolly rump was something to see. The whole world loves a puppy like that.

And George Gnevni kicked the thing end over end and high into the air with a remarkably powerful boot. The sound that came from the broken creature as it crash-landed against a wall was a heart-rending wail that would have melted the heart of a stone toad.

Gnevni was disgusted with himself.

“Less than ten meters. Should have hooted him twelve. I’ll kill the blood-sucking cod-headed little cur the next time. Nothing goes right today.”

It was not a real puppy; it was better than a real one. There is something artificial in the joy and carrying on of a real puppy as well as in its hurt screaming. But the antics of this one rang true. The thing was made by a competent artist, and it was well made.

It could be set to go through the same routine again at a moment’s notice.

A Crippled Old Lady came up shaking with palsy. There was real beauty in her face yet, and a serenity that pain could never take away from her.

“A glorious morning to you, my good man,” she said to Gnevni.

And he kicked her crutches out from under her.

“I am sure that was an accident, sir,” she gasped as she teetered and nearly fell. “Would you be so kind as to hand them to me again? I’m quite unable to stand without them.”

Gnevni knocked her down with a smacking blow. He then stomped up and down on her body from stem to stern. And with a heavy two-footed jump on her stomach he left her writhing on the pavement.

Gnevni was again disgusted with himself.

“It doesn’t seem to do a thing for me today,” he said, “not a thing. I don’t know what’s the matter with me this morning.”

It was a real lady. We are afraid of dog-lovers, but we are not afraid of

people-lovers. There are so few of them. So the lady was not an artificial one. She was real flesh and blood, and the least of both. However, she was neither crippled nor old. She was a remarkably athletic woman and had been a stunt girl before she found her true vocation. She was also a fine young actress and played the Crippled Old Lady role well.

Gnevni went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building that was popularly known as the Milk Shed.

“Bring my things, crow-bait,” he grumbled at a nice young lady assistant. “I see the rats have been in your hair again. Are you naturally deformed or do you stand that way on purpose? There’s a point, you know, beyond which ugliness is no longer a virtue.”

The nice young lady began to cry, but not very convincingly. She went off to get Gnevni’s things. But she would bring only a part of them, and, not all of them the right ones.

Old George isn’t himself this morning,” said the underdoctor Cotrel.

I know,” said under-doctor Devon. “We’ll have to devise something to get him mad today. We can’t have him getting pleasant on us.

The required paranexus could not be synthesized. Many substances had been tried and all of them had been found insufficient. But the thing was needed for the finest operation of the Programmeds. It had to be the real thing, and there was only one way to get a steady supply of it.

At one time they had simplified it by emphasizing the cortin and adrenalin components of it. Later they had emphasized a dozen other components, and then a hundred. And finally they accepted it for what it was too complex for duplication, too necessary an accessory for the programmeds to be neglected, too valuable at its most effective to be taken from random specimens. It could be had only from Humans, and it could be had in fine quality only from a special sort of Humans. The thing was very complex, but at the Institute they called it Oil of Dog.

Peredacha was a pleasant little contrivance — a “Shadler Movement” or “female” of the species that had once been called homo canventus or robot and was now referred to as “Programmed Person.”

She had a sound consciousness, hint of developing originality, a capacity for growth and a neatness of mechanism and person. She might be capable of fine work of the speculative sort. She was one of those on whom the added spark might not be wasted.

Always they had worked to combine the best elements of both sorts.

The Programmed Persons were in many respects superior to the Old Becension Persons or Humans. They were of better emotional balance, of greater diligence, of wider adaptability, of much vaster memory or accumulation and of readier judgment based on that memory. But there was one thing lacking in the most adept of the Programmed that was often to be found in the meanest of the humans. This was a thing very hard to name.

It was the little bit extra; but the Programmed already had the very much extra. It had something of the creative in it, though the Programmed were surely more creative than the Humans. It was the rising to the occasion; the Programmed could do this more gracefully, but sometimes less effectively, than could the Humans. It was the breaking out of a framework, the utter lack of complacency, the sudden surge of power or intellect, the bewildering mastery of the moment, the thing that made the difference.

It was the Programmed themselves who sought out the thing, for they were the more conscious of the difference. It was the Programmed technicians who set up the system. It cost the Humans nothing, and it profited the Programmed very much in their persons and personalities.

On many of them, of course, it had little effect; but on a select few it had the effect of raising them to a genius grade. And many of them who could never become geniuses did become specialists to a degree unheard of before — and all because of the peculiar human additive.

It was something like the crossing of the two races, though there could never be a true cross of species so different—one of them not being of the reproductive sort. The adrenal complex sometimes worked great changes on a Programmed.

There were but a few consistent prime sources of it — and each of them somehow had his distinguishing mark. Often a Programmed felt an immediate kinship, seldom reciprocated, with the Human donor. And Peredacha, a very responsive Programmed, felt the kinship keenly when the additive was given to her.

“I claim for paternity,” she cried. It was a standard joke of the Programmed. ~’I claim as daughter to my donor! I never believed it before. I thought it only one of those things that everybody says. The donors are such a surly bunch that it drives them really violent til one of us seeks their acquaintance on this pretext. But I’m curious. Which one

was it?”

She was told.

“Oh no! Not him of the whole clutch! How droll can you get? He is my new kindred? But never before did I feel so glorious. Never have I been able to work so well.”

The assigned job of George Gnevni was a mechanical one. In the ordinary course of things this would be all wrong, for George had less mechanical aptitude than any man ever born. George had very little aptitude for anything at all in the world — until his one peculiar talent was discovered.

He was an unhandsome and graceless man, and he lived in poverty. Much has been said about the compensations of physical ugliness — mostly the same things that have been said about poverty. It is often maintained that they may be melded behind the dross front, that the sterling character may develop and shine through the adversity.

It is lies, it is lies! It happens only rarely that these things are ennobling. With persons of the commoner sort it happens not at all. To be ugly and clumsy and poor at the same time will finally drive a man to raving anger against the whole world.

And that was the idea.

Gnevni was assigned a mean lodging, and his meal tickets were peculiar ones. He could not obtain what he wanted to eat. He could have only what was on the list for him to eat, and this was evilly contrived to cover everything that disagreed with him. As a result he was usually in gastric pain and in seething anger at his own entrails. He had an ugly nature to begin with, but the form of life forced upon him deepened and nurtured it.

Gnevni’s voice was harsh and jangling, though there was real mastery of resonance in his powerful howling when his anger reached high form. He was denied wifing privileges, and no woman would have had him in any case. He was allowed just enough of bad whoa-johnny whisky to keep him edgy and mean, but not enough to bring him solace.

He was an oaf — an obscene distasteful clod of humanity. He knew it and he boiled and seethed with the shoddy knowledge. He was no better than a badger in a cage, but those things are terrific snappers.

For his poor livelihood he was given a quota of mechanical tasks to complete every day, and he had no meehanical aptitude at all. They were

simple assembly jobs. A competent Programmed Person could do in minutes what it took Gnevni all day to do.

Most children of the human species could do the same things easily and quickly — though some might not be able to do them at all, for the Humans are less uniform in their abilities than the Programmed. The things that Gnevni was to assemble were never all there, some of them were the wrong things, and some of them were defective. A Programmed would have spotted the off stuff at once and sent it back, but ugly George had no way of telling whether things were right or not. He sweated and swore his days away at the grotesque labor and became the angriest man alive.

Joker tools were sometimes substituted on him for the true with shafts as flexible as spaghetti, key-drifts with noses as soft as wax, box-end wrench sets that were sized to fit nothing, soldering guns that froze ice on their tips, mismarked calipers with automatic slippage, false templates, unworkable crimpers, continuity testers that shocked a man to near madness.

It is a legend that humans have an affinity for mechanical things. But normal humans have an innate hatred for machinery, and the accommodation that has grown up between them is a nervous one. The damned stuff just doesn't work right. You hate it, and it hates you. That's the old basic of it.

Swift, a wise old mad man, once wrote a piece on the "Perversity of Inanimate Objects." And they are perverse, particularly to a sick, ugly, ignorant, incompetent, poor man who fights them in a frenzy — and they fight back.

All day long George Gnevni and a few of his unfortunate fellows attacked their tasks explosively — the air blue with multi-syllabled profanity, and anger dancing about like summer lightning. Now and then, people came and inserted tubes into these unfortunates, and performed some other indignities upon them.

The paranexus, the complex substance, the "Oil of Dog" that was needed for stimulation of the Programmed, while it could be taken from any Humans, could only be had in its prime form from a depraved, insane sort of Very Angry Men.

But today George Gnevni was not himself. There was only a sullenness in him, not the required flaming purple anger.

“We have to prod him,” said under-doctor Cotrel. “We can’t waste a whole day on him. He’s sick enough. He tests at a high enough pitch of excitement. Why won’t he put out? Why won’t he get mad?”

“I have an idea,” said under-doctor Devon. “We have an inner-office memo that one of the Programmed has recognized kinship with him. You remember when Wut was in a slump? We got a Programmed up here who threw an arm around him and called him Uncle Wilbur. The way Wut exploded, seismographs must have recorded the shock at a considerable distance. We had to move fast to prevent him from damaging the Programmed. And then Wut was so mad that we were able to use him around the clock for seventy-two hours. How our Very Angry Men do hate the Programmed! They call them the things.”

“Good. Anything that worked on Wet ought to work double on Gnevni. Get the Programmed Person up here. We’ll have him at ugly George.”

“Her. She’s a Shadier Movement Programmed and so technically a female.”

“Better yet. I can hardly wait, Gnevni is the most spectacular of them all when he really goes wild. We should get a good production from him.”

Peredacha, the talented little Shadier Movement Programmed, came to the Cortin Institute Building — the Milk Shed. She understood the situation and enjoyed it. The Programmed have their humor — more urbane than that of Humans, and yet as genuine — and they appreciate the hilarity of an incongnious confrontation.

Peredacha was something of an actress, for all the Programmed have a talent for mimicry. She considered the role for a moment, and she put all her talent into it.

And she did it! She made herself into the most pathetic urchin since the Little Match Girl. Yet she was a Programmed and not a Human; it was as though a gear box should put on a waif’s shawl and turn tear-jerker.

They brought her in.

“Papa!” Peredacha cried and rushed toward Gnevni.

The attendants had closed between them to prevent damage when the anger of the low man should rise like a jagged wave.

The show should have been greater than the one that Wut had once put on for less reason. Gnevni was a bigger man with more power of anger, and the situation was even more ridiculous. It should have set



records on the decibel-recorder, filled the room with brimstone, and enriched the vocabulary of scatology.

But it didn't.

The face of George Gnevni was slack, and he shook his heavy head sadly.

"Take the child away," he said dully. "I will not be responsible for my feelings today."

It was a new morning and George Gnevni must return to his brutal livelihood.

A too-happy puppy came bounding up to him — a bundle of hysterically gay yipes with a wagging rump and tail hitclied on to them.

"Hello, little fellow," Gnevni said and bent down to pet it. But the puppy was not programmed for such treatment. It was made to be kicked by angry men. It threw itself into a series of reverse somersaults and heart-rending wails as though it had been kicked indeed.

"Oh, the poor little toy!" said Gnevni. "It has never known kindness."

"Look, Gnevni," said an inferior sort of man who came up, "the dog was made for one thing only — so that twelve or thirteen of you hotfires could kick it every morning and get into your mood. Now kick too."

"I won't do it."

"I'll report you."

"I don't care. How could anyone harm that poor little tyke?" The Crippled Old Lady came up, shaking as with palsy. "A glorious good morning to you, my good man," she said to Gnevni.

"And a fine morning to you, my lady," he said.

"What? You're not supposed to say that! You're supposed to kick my crutches out from under me and then knock me down and trample on me. It helps get you in your mood. Crippled Old ladies are infuriating sights to the Very Angry Men; they make them even angrier. Everybody knows that."

"I just don't believe that I will do it today, ah — Margaret, is that not your name? A fine day to you, my dear."

"Knock off that fine day stuff! I have my job to do. I'm a mood piece. You blow-tops are supposed to kick out my crutches and tromp me down to get in your mood. Now start kicking or I'll report you." "Do so if you must, my dear."

Gnevni went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building, and there he

was good for nothing.

Mad? He wasn't even sullen. He was puzzled and pleasant, and when you have one of the old stand-bys go pleasant on you you're in trouble. He was civil to everybody and gave them all the jitters. He completed his mechanical tasks in an hour — finding them much easier when he attacked them calmly. But he wasn't supposed to find them easier.

So there was ecostemation in the Department. Gnevni had been the best producer of them all. They couldn't let him go by like that.

"Damn you, get mad!" under-doctor Cotrel shouted and shook him. "We won't have any malingering on the job. Get mad and start putting out."

"I just don't seem able to get mad today," said Gnevni honestly. "You double-damned will get mad, you crudhead!" pursued under-doctor Cotrel. Cotrel seemed rather upset himself. "Under-doctor Devon! Over-doctor Ratracer! Director Duggle! Come help me with this pig-headed fellow. He won't get mad."

"He's got to get mad," said underdoctor Devon. "We'll make the filth-eating fink get mad."

"It looks bad," said Director Duggle. "He was at only half efficiency yesterday, and today he's good for nothing at all. Well, put him through the routine. We can't have him going sour at us."

They put him through the routine. It was brutal. It would have made a roaring devil out of the sweetest saint. Even spectators commonly became white with fury when such a thing was put on, and there was no limit to the effect on the victim. Gnevni endured it with composed sorrow but without anger. And when even the routine didn't work what more could you do to him?

Under-doctor Cotrel began to cuff and kick him: "Get mad, you slimy sulphurous son of a she shink! Get mad, you mud-headed old monkey! Get mad, you dirt-eating mutt-head! You slobber-mouthed donkey, get mad!"

They brought in others. They even brought in Peredacha — hoping she would have a more positive effect on him than she had had the day before. But Gnevni brightened up to see her.

"Ah, it is my little daughter! I sent you notes at intervals through the evening and night, but I guess you did not receive them. It is so wonderful just to see you again."

“Why you bat-whiskered old bum, was it you who sent those notes? ‘Sweet papa.’ You? By the shop where I was made, I never heard of anything like it before!”

“Do not be cruel, Peredacha. You are all that I care for in the world. With you I could become a new man.”

“Well, not being human I guess I can be humane. I’ll look after you, ugly papa. But they don’t want you to become a new man; as the old one you were the best they had. Come now, get mad for the people. It’s your job.”

“I know, but I’m unable to do it. I have been thinking, Peredacha, that since you are my daughter in a way — cortin of my cortin and adrenalin of my adrenalin — perhaps the two of us might go off somewhere and —”

“Holy howling hog!” Under-doctor Cotrel took off in a screech too high for the human ear to follow, so perhaps only Peredacha heard and flushed. And then Cotrel broke up completely. He kicked and beat on Gnevni. He shrilled and sobbed and gobbled. And when his sounds once more became intelligible it was a screaming, “Get mad, damn you, get mad!”

Cotrel was a lean man, hut powerfully corded and muscled, and now every cord of muscle and nerve stood glaringly out on him black and purple.

That man was plain frantic in his displeasure at Gnevni. The flying foam from his lips flecked the room—something you would not have expected from under-doctor Cotrel.

“It is all right,” said Director Duggle. “Gnevni was about finished in any case. The best of them are only good for a year or two — the pace is a terrific one. And we are lucky to have his replacement ready at hand.”

“Replacement?” roared the livid Cotrel. “He’s got to get mad! There isn’t any replacement.” And he continued to strike Gnevni.

“I believe that the director has you in mind, Cotrel,” said over-doctor Ratracer. “Yes. I am sure of it.”

“Me? I am under-doctor Cotrel! I make five hundred Guzman d’or a month!”

“And now you will make five,” said Director Duggle. “Grinding poverty is a concomitant of your new job. I had suspected you had a talent for it. Now I am sure. You begin immediately. You become the latest, and soon I hope the best, of the Very Angry Men.”

Cotrel became so, and immediately. Gnevni had been good. Wut before him had been one of the best. But for carrying-on noise and stink generally, there was never such an exhibition as Mad Man Cotrel now put on — getting into the spirit of his new job — he was the maddest man you ever saw!

## THE MAN WITH THE SPECKLED EYES

In those days there had been a clique of six men who controlled it all. Any new thing went to one of them — or it went nowhere. Discovery and invention cannot be allowed to break out all over the lot.

These six men did not work in particular harmony. They were called the clique because they were set apart from others by their influence; and because of their names, which were: Claridge, Lone, Immermann, Quinn, Umholtz, and Easter.

Now the six men were reduced to two. On successive days, Claridge, Lone, Immermann, and Quinn had disappeared — and they had done it pretty thoroughly. In each case, somebody had to know something about their disappearance; and in each case, that somebody refused to tell.

Claridge's man, Gueranger, had been with Claridge at the time of the disappearance or shortly before. He admitted that much. But nothing intelligent could be got from him.

"The truth of it is that I don't know the truth of it," Gueranger insisted. "Yes, I was there, but I don't know what happened."

"Don't you know what you saw?" asked the investigator.

"No, I don't. That's the whole point of the matter: I will not accept, and will not tell, what I saw. Certainly I know that I'm held on suspicion of murder. But where is the body? You find it - anywhere — in any shape and I'll sure sleep better."

In the second case, Ringer and Mayhall both seemed to know something of the disappearance of their employer, Lone. The three of them had walked in the plaza at evening. Only two of them had come back — and they much shaken.

"I know what I seemed to see," Ringer ventured, "and I will not tell it. I'm not stubborn and I'm not sensitive to laughter, but I've sealed the whole thing off in a corner of my mind and I won't disturb it. I've hopes of hanging on to some pieces of my reason, and to open this again would set me back."

"Loric?" Mayhall grunted. "I guess the damned fool swallowed himself. He's sure gone completely. Yes, I was with him, and I won't say any nearer than that what happened."

"I simply will not explain," said Immermann's advisor, Hebert. "He is gone, and I do not believe he will be back. No. If it was a hoax, I wasn't in

on it, and I don't understand it. Do I believe that he wished to disappear for a private reason? Did he — wherever he has gone — go willingly? No, gentlemen, he did not go willingly! I never saw a man so reluctant to go.”

“I will not say what happened to Mr. Quinn,” said Pacheco, Quinn's assistant. “Of course I know that he was an important man — the most important in the world to me. You say that you will have answers out of me one way or the other? Then you'll have nothing but babbling out of a crazy man.

“Why, yes, I suppose that you can hang me for murder. I don't know how those things are worked. It seems extreme, however. I thought there was a Latin phrase involved, about a body being required. Lay off now, fellows. I'm cracking up, I tell you.”

The investigators didn't lay off, but so far they had got nothing out of any of the witnesses. The four disappearances had to be as one, and the witnesses were certainly of a pattern.

“Are Extraterrestrials Kidnapping Our Top Talent?” the news banners read.

“Oh, hell,” said Umholtz in his cluttered office. “Hell,” said Easter in his clean one. They both knew that they were not men of any particular talent, and that the four men who had disappeared were not. They were shufflers and dealers in talent, that is all. In popular idea, they were responsible for the inventions they marketed. But off-Earth people — bent on such showy kidnappings — would have picked off seminal geniuses and not talent brokers.

Four gone, two to go. Would the next one be Umholtz or Easter? Umholtz felt that it would be himself. He and his assistant, Planter, were worrying about it together when Shartel the aide came in to them.

“There's one to see you, Mr. Umholtz,” said Shartel with diffidence, for he was only half the bulk of his employer.

“An inventor?” Umholtz always sneered with his eyebrows when he spoke that word, although inventors were the only stock he dealt in.

“Who else comes to see us, Mr. Umholtz? This one may be worth investigating, though probably not for any invention he has.”

“A crackie? What does he have?”

“A crackie from end to end, and he won't say what he has.”

“We're not scanning clients these days, Shartel. I explain that to you every ten minutes. We're spending all our time worrying about the

disappearances. Creative worry, Planter here calls it, and I don't appreciate his humor. I haven't time for a crackie today."

"He got to see Claridge, Lone, Immermann, and Quinn — all a couple of hours before their disappearance."

"All inventors make the same rounds. There's nobody else they can go to. And weren't there a couple of others who saw them all?"

"The others have all been checked out clean. This is the last one. The authorities have been looking for him and have left word to call if he showed. I'll ring them as soon as he's in here. There's a slim chance that he knows something, but he sure doesn't look it."

"Send him in, Shartel. Has he a name?"

"Haycock. And he looks as though he had slept in one."

Haycock didn't really have hay in his hair — that was only the color and lay of it. He had blue eyes with happy, dangerous gold specks in them, and a friendly and humorous sneer. He looked rather an impudent comedian, but inventors come in all sizes. He had something of the back-country hayseed in him. But also something of the panther.

"I have here what may turn out to be a most useful device," Haycock began. "Good. You have sent the underlings away. I never talk in their presence. They're inclined to laugh at me. I am offering you the opportunity to get in on the top floor with my device, Mr. Umholtz."

"Haycock, you have the aspect of a man entranced by one of the four basic fallacies. If so, you are wasting my time. But I want to question you on a side issue. Is it true that you visited all four of them — Claridge, Lone, Immermano, and Quinn — on the days of their disappearances?"

"Sounds like their names. Four blind bats! None of them could see my invention at first. All of them laughed at it. Forget those fools, Umholtz. You can grow new fools, but what I have here is unique. It is the impossible invention."

"By the impossible inventor, from the looks of you. I hold up four fingers, and one is it. Tell it in one word, Haycock!"

"Anti-grav."

"Fourth finger. It's not even the season for anti-grav, Haycock. These things go in cycles. We get most of the anti-gravs in early winter. All right, I give you four seconds to demonstrate. Raise that table off the floor with your device."

"It's barely possible that I could raise it, Umholtz, but not in four

seconds. It would take several hours; instant demonstration is out. It's a pretty erratic piece of machinery, though I've had good luck on my last several attempts. It isn't really very impressive, and a lot of what I tell you you'll have to take on faith."

"Haven't any, Haycock. Even a charlatan can usually put on a good show. Why the two pieces? One looks like a fishing tackle box, and the other like a sheaf of paper."

"The papers are the mathematics of it, Umholtz. Look at the equations carefully and you'll be convinced without a demonstration."

"All right. I pride myself on the speed I bring to spotting these basic errors, Haycock. They seem very commonplace equations, and then they break off when it's plain that you're getting nowhere. What happened to the bottom of these sheets?"

"Oh, my little boy ate that part of them. Just go ahead and you'll pick up the continuity again. Ah, you're at the end of it and you laugh! Yes, is it not funny how simple every great truth is?"

"I've seen them all, Haycock, and this is one of the most transparent. The only thing wrong with it is that it won't work and it's as full of holes as a seine."

"But it does work part of the time, Umholtz, and we'll fill up the holes till it's practical. Well, is it a deal? It'll take a couple of years; but if you'll start plenty of money rolling, I'll get on with the project in a big way. Why do you roll your eyes like that, Umholtz? Is there a history of apoplexy in your family?"

"I will be all right in a moment, Haycock. I am afflicted by inventors, but I recover quickly. Let us set the gadget aside for the moment. Do you know where the four now-celebrated men have gone?"

"Papers said it was as if they had disappeared from the Earth. I imagine they sent a reporter or someone to check on it."

"Take Claridge, for instance," said Umholtz, "Did he seem disturbed when you last saw him?"

"I think he was the little one. He was kind of boggle-eyed, just like you were a minute ago. Kind of mad at me for wasting his time. Well pig's pants! I wasted my time, too! Blind as a bat, that man. Don't think he was convinced that my thing would work till maybe right at the end. Now let's get back to my instrument. It will do a variety of jobs. Even you can see where it would be useful."



“It would be, if it worked, and it won’t. Your piece of mathematics is childish, Haycock.”

“Might be. I don’t express myself well in that medium. But my machine does work. It creates negative gravity. That is, it works quite a bit of the time.”

Umholtz laughed. He shouldn’t have, but he didn’t know. And he did have an ugly sort of laugh.

“You laugh at me!” Haycock howled out. Gold fire popped from his eyes and he was very angry. The hayseed began to look like the panther. He touched his machine, and it responded with a sympathetic ping! to the anger of its master.

Umholtz was having fun with the now-blazing inventor.

“What do you do, Haycockandbull, turn that machine on and point it at something?” he guffawed. Umholtz enjoyed deriding a fellow.

“You hopeless hulk! I turned it on a minute ago when you laughed at me. It’s working on you now. You’ll be convinced in the end,” Haycock threatened.

“Do you not know, Haycock, that anti-grav is the standing joke in our profession? But they still come in with it, and they all have that same look in their eyes.”

“Umholtz, you lie! Nobody else ever had this look in his eye!”

That was true. The gold specks in the blue eyes glinted in a mad way. The eyes did not focus properly. It seemed to Umholtz that Haycock did not look at him, but through him and beyond. The man might well be a maniac — the sort of maniac who could somehow be involved in the four disappearances. Never mind, they were coming for him. They’d be here any minute.

“Anti-grav is a violation of the laws of mass and energy,” Umholtz needed.

“To change the signature of a mass from plus to minus is not a violation of any law I recognize,” said Haycock evenly. “It is no good for you to justify now, Umholtz, or to find excuses. It is no use to plead for your life. Are you deaf as well as blind and stupid? I told you plainly that the demonstration had already begun. You were all a stubborn lot, but I convinced all four of them in the end, and I’ll convince you. I tell you, Umholtz, that entrenched stupidity makes me mad, and when I get mad I sure do get mean. I’ve cancelled you out, you open idiot! Umholtz, I’ll

send you away screaming!”

“Rather I’ll send you away in that act,” Umholtz purred, for the men in black were now into the room, and they laid legal hands on Haycoek.

“Take him away,” Umholtz grunted out. “He’s fishier than Edward’s Ichthyology.”

Haycock didn’t go away screaming, but he went roaring and fighting. That man was very mean, and those gold specks in his eyes were really sulphur.

Say, they couldn’t get a thing out of that fellow. Haycock was an odd one, but that was all. They went over him from the beginning. He was known in his own neighborhood for his unsuccessful inventions and for his towering temper, but he hadn’t any bodies lying around, and he hadn’t been anywhere near any of the four men at the time of their disappearances.

He was a crackie from end to end, but he hadn’t a handle they could get hold of.

“I am not ghoulish,” Umholtz said to his men Planter and Shartel, “but the disappearance of four of my five competitors has opened up some pretty obvious opportunities for me. Oh, other men will be designated to replace them, hut it’ll be a long time before they get that sharp.”

“What did the crackie have this afternoon, Mr. Umholtz?” Planter asked him.

“It isn’t worth mentioning. One of the oldest and silliest.”

The three of them were walking in the park in the evening.

“I suddenly feel odd,” said Umholtz and he placed one hand on his head and the other on his paunch. “Something I ate for supper didn’t agree with me.”

“It’s the worry,” said Planter. “The disappearances have upset you. With the thought that you might be next on the list, there has been a great weight on you.”

“I really feel as though a great weight has been lifted off me,” said Umholtz, “but I don’t like the feeling. I’m light-headed.”

“The walk will do you good,” Planter told him. “You look well to me. I’ve never seen you move with so light a step.”

“No, no, I’m sick,” Umholtz moaned, and he began to look up in the air as though fearful of an attack from that sector. “My feet don’t track

right. There's a lightness in me. My stomach is turning inside out. Lord, but it would be a long way to fall!"

Umholtz flopped his way forward, his feet slipping on the grass as though he had lost traction. He got hold of the tree — a small elm.

"I'm starting to go!" he howled in real terror.

He put a bear hug around the tree, locking on to it with both arms and legs. "Great dancing dogfish, don't let me fall," he sobbed. "How did I ever get so high up?"

"Umholtz, you are six inches from the ground," Planter told him. "The man's gone mad, Shartel. Let's pry his legs loose first. When we get his feet on the ground he may get over his mania about falling."

"Fools! Fools! You'll let me fall all the way down," Umholtz screamed, but he was looking upward, and his face was flushed as though all the blood had run to his head.

"He was right," Umholtz sniffled wetly in an interlude from his screaming and sobbing. "I'm finally convinced."

"There's one leg loose, Shartel," said Planter as he worked on Umholtz, "but for some reason it seems pretty difficult to hold it to the ground. Now the other leg, and we'll set him down on his feet. Whoops! What's wrong? You're going up with him, Shartel!"

Shartel did go up with him at first, for Umholtz was much the heavier man. But Shartel broke away and fell a dozen feet down to the grass.

Umholtz grabbed a precarious lodging in the tree top, but he was shearing off fronds and branches and going fast.

"For God's sake, get me up from here!" Umholtz screamed, hanging upward from the topmost branch. He was like a tethered balloon tugging at its mooring.

"Throw a rope down to me! Do something!" he sobbed upsidedownly from the tree top. "I'll fall all the way, and I can't even see bottom."

The topmost branch broke, and Umholtz fell off the world.

He fell upward into the evening sky, his scream drop-ping in pitch as he accelerated. He fell end over end, diminishing till he was only a dot in the sky. Then he was gone.

"What will we tell people - what — what can we say — however explain — how explain what we seen seem —" Shartel rattled, the bones in his body shaking like poker dice in a toss box.

"You tell your he and I'll tell mine," Planter grumbled. "I'm crazy, but

I'm not crazy enough to have seen that."

Of the clique, only Easter was left. He was the most even-minded of the bunch and the least inclined to worry. It had been a peculiar series of events that had devoured his competitors, but he hadn't been able to base any theory on the disappearances. If he continued, he would be next.

"I may try a little worrying myself," he mused. "A man of my sort shouldn't neglect any field of cogitation. I'll give it a try. It should come easy for me today."

So Easter worried, but he didn't do it well. It isn't easy if you haven't the lifetime habit of it.

Then a man came in to him unannounced.

This was a man with hay-colored hair, with blue eyes with happy dangerous gold specks in them, a man with a friendly and humorous sneer. He had something of the hayseed in him. But also something of the panther.

"I have here what may turn out to be a most useful device," Haycock began.

## PIG IN A POKEY

This was on Hippodamia. The name isn't important. There were ten thousand asteroid-stations as undistinguished.

Netter settled back into the soft live-moss chair and prepared to talk the Creature out of the impasse. Then he saw the big moustached thing on the wall and he began to tremble.

After all, that was one of the things he had come to find-it was part of it. It was the great beefy, bearded, moustached head of Captain Kalbfleish mounted on the wall like a trophy, and amid the other trophies of the room.

"Great God, Man!" — and it wasn't a man to whom he spoke — "That's a human head you have mounted on the wall," Netter crackled.

"Which Great God, yours or mine?" Porcellus grunted. "They aren't the same, or they have been described badly. Yes, a human head. I had always wanted one. You notice that I have given it the favored position in the center of the great wall. I now have at least one of the heads of every species that interests me. Some of the heads are much larger than that of your friend Kalbfleish and have ornamentals that his lacks. It's a pity that humans don't have sweeping horns; that would make them perfect. But even without them, the head of Kalbfleish is the finest in my collection. It's a truly magnificent head!"

It was. "Kalbfleish has a fine head on him" they were to say, and laugh. The big Captain, for all his remarkable courage and spirit, had not been long on brains. It was a huge, wild, hairy head with a stark and staring expression — as though Kalbfleish had died in terror and agony.

"You killed him, of course," said Netter dryly as he braided a roman in his nervous hands. "So, one way or the other, I will have to kill you, or you me.

"Not I," said Porcellus — a moist and hog-fat creature — "I would not even kill an insect. Your friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. He was uncommonly energetic, especially so on the day of his death."

"Where is his body, you fat pig?"

"My translator has only a rough idea of pig, and I suppose you intend it for an insult; but I have a tough hide. I couldn't do a thing with his body, Netter, it was putrid in no time. It seems that when you humans

know you are going to die you would begin to give yourself the injections three or four basic days before the time; then your bodies would not turn foul after death. I had no idea he had neglected it, so I wasn't prepared. I was lucky to save the head."

"We humans don't know when we are going to die," said Netter. "What is this you give me to eat? It's good."

"Yes, I remember now Kalbfleish saying he didn't know when he would die, but I supposed he spoke in humor. Since you also sayv it, it must be true of your species. The name of the food would mean nothing to you, but you have a close parallel to its method of preparation. I have read about geese in an Earth book of the captains, though I overlooked pigs. You sometimes put live geese — to dance on hot griddles before they are killed. This excites and alarms them, and enlarges their livers. The livers then become delicacies. The creatures whose meat you are eating also died of excitement and alarm, and they are delicious through and through."

Well, the meat was certainly delicious. That fat hog of a creature knew how to live well. Netter finished the meal and set it aside. Once more he braided the romal in his hands while he grasped for words.

"I suppose all the creatures whose heads you have here died by accident, Porcellus?" he asked.

"Well, all but one of them died," said Porcellus, "and I did not kill them. One of them died at a great distance from here; he willed me his head and had it sent to me because I had admired it. And one of them, so far as I know, is still alive. He was a being of multiplex heads. He hacked one of them off quite willingly when I praised it, and he cured and mounted it himself. A queer chap. He is staring down at you now and it will amuse you to guess which lie is."

Porcellus didn't actually speak like that. He spoke in a series of grunts, some verbal and some ventral. But the Console Translator of Netter had a selector dial. Netter could dial translation in pidgin, in cut and dry, in bombast, in diplomatic pleasantries, in old southern U.S. soft talk or Yiddish dialect if he wished, or in the manner. Whenever he encountered a creature who was curtly repulsive to him — as Porcellus was — he dialed the courtly manner of speech. This was somehow easier on his ears and his nerves.

"We waste time," Netter told the creature. "I have come to pursue

claim to this asteroid. We now need it for a way-station, and it has never worked well for two such different species to share a station. We had first claim here long ago; and we abandoned it. Then you set up your station here; and you also abandoned it.”

“Never,” said Porcellus. “Would I abandon my cozy home and my trophies? Would my masters wish the removal of so fine a station-master as myself? I was called Home on urgent business. I was to go for a basic year, and the odds were very high against any other claimer coming while I was gone.”

“The rules state that a live and competent agent must be in residence at all times or the asteroid can be declared abandoned,” Netter said. “The asteroid was plainly abandoned when Kalbfleish arrived; you were gone. He so reported it, and he claimed it for us. The claim was approved and accepted.”

“True,” said the creature Porcellus. “What is that thing you play with in your hands? But Captain Kalbfleish — following the awkward interval after I had returned — also abandoned the station by dying. I so reported his death, and claimed the station for ourselves once more. The claim was approved and accepted. Now you are here as my guest only and, I tell you in all kindness, not a very welcome one.

“But a proved murder will void your claim,” said Netter.

“So prove it, fine man,” said the creature Porcellus. “Yours is a smaller head than Kalbfleish’s but it has a certain distinction. I could make room for it among my trophies. We have each of us sent various reports, and the matter is under litigation. In the meanwhile, the accidental death of either of us would void his claim and settle the matter. We cannot kill directly. Investigators are already on the way and we are both prime suspects; we are the only ones here. What is the leather thing with which you play?”

“A romal, Porcellus. A short qulrt braided onto a rein. They made them in Old Mexico and in California and Texas, but they were mostly ornamental.”

“Earth places all three, my translator says. Were they used with a creature?”

“With a pony, a horse.”

“Haven’t I stumbled onto the information that the horse is extinct?”

“Yes. The braiding of the little thing is only a hobby of mine.”

“A hobby, according to my comprehensive translator, is a sort of vicarious horse — a mental surrogate which one rides. Is that correct?”

“Correct, Porcellus. Haven’t you a hobby?”

“My hobby is heads,” said the thing.

Netter started to leave the creature then to go to his own camp. “To the early and accidental death of one of us,” he toasted with the last of the drink that Porcellus had given him.

“Shoals!” toasted Porcellus. “I believe that is your word. And a warning: stay away from the low dome which you will see on the plain. It’s dangerous.”

Netter went to his own camp.

Now Porcellus wanted him to go to the curious dome — or he would not have warned him away from it. Was it dangerous? Or did the thing merely want to divert him? Porcellus must have known that he would explore every feature of landscape on the small asteroid. Perhaps it was only to worry him, as Porcellus himself had seemed to be worried. And what in hog heaven can worry a hog? Netter had it after a while. “He knows when he’s going to die. He’s surprised that humans haven’t that knowledge. But can I depend on it? It’s only a twice removed guess.

Netter left the dome till last. He circumnavigated the asteroid in a brisk six-mile walk and found nothing of interest. He came thoughtfully to the dome on the plain.

The dome rose to no more than the height of his head in the center, was about sixty feet in diameter, was symmetrical in general outline but with a slightly roughened surface, and was probably artificial. “I believe it is an old direction beacon of the Forcines,” he said. “Yes, this is certainly the top of an obsolete hemisphere, and the most of it is under ground. They were no good. I believe that we had them once.”

Netter stepped gingerly onto the sphere. It was certainly firm enough. He knew a firm thing when he met one. There was no danger of him crashing through. He climbed the steep, then the less steep elevation of it and came to the center. “Nice,” he said, “but nothing.” Then he felt it activated. “So Porcellus still uses it,” he said, “I didn’t realize that they were so backward.”

He walked around on it, and it rotated gently under him, compensating for him. He strode down the side a little way, and it quickly brought him back to the top. “This could be fun,” he said.



He could take three, four quick steps away from the top, and he would still be on top. He could tense to jump sideways, and the sphere would compensate before he left the surface; he'd still land exactly on the center whichever way he jumped. The thing rolled easily and noiselessly and anticipated or reacted immediately to every movement. He walked, he ran, he laughed, he trotted half a mile and stood where he had stood before.

"You know tricks and I know tricks, old sphere," he shouted, "let's see who's the smarter." He feinted, he broke, he dodged, he ran crazy-legged as though he were broken-field dribbling at Galactic-rules football. He shucked off tacklers, he scored countless goals in his mind, but he always ended on the very center top of the dome.

He lay down and rolled, trying to go down the steep far slopes as though they were grass banks. He stopped rolling and lay on his back, and he was still on the top of the rotating compensating sphere or dome.

"I haven't had so much fun since I was a boy in an amusement park," he said.

He hadn't? Then why did he suddenly begin to tremble? Why did he begin to whistle so off-key if he wasn't scared? "Stone walls do not a pokey make nor locks a —" it was the Cross-Bar Hotel Blues he was whistling and he had to stop it.

He was locked tight in jail on a little hillock in the middle of a plain, and there was no barrier in sight. There was no possible way he could get off the compensating dome.

He was imprisoned in the highest most open spot on the asteroid. In an hour of cavorting and hopping about he had not got one full step from where he started, and there was no possible way that he could.

He thought about it for a full Hippodamia day and night-forty-five minutes basic time. He couldn't come up with a thing.

"If I had a rope and you had a stump," he said talking to no one, "I'd rope the stump — I'm good at that — and pull myself off this thing."

But he didn't have a rope and the plain sure didn't have a stump. It had hardly a pebble as big as his thumb.

"This is where Kalbfleish died," said Netter. "You said it right, pig man, my friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. You didn't have to murder him directly. You let him run himself to death. He was uncommonly energetic, as you said' and especially so on the day of

his death. I can see it all now. He could never stand to be confined. He would have gone wild when he found himself confined in what seemed the most open space on the asteroid. He'd have run till he ruptured every thing in him. It is no wonder that he died with that look of horror."

This was a jail that nobody could break. Why try more tricks on the sphere? It could compensate for every trick that was.

A creature that could fly in zero atmosphere could get off of this, he mused. "Even a worm couldn't crawl off unless he were too small to affect the compensators. If I had two cant hooks I might be able to fool the thing, but it could no doubt compensate for the resolution of forces. If I had a weight on a line I might puzzle it a little, but not much. Porkey has it made. I'll die either of starvation or exertion or insanity, but the investigation will not show that I was murdered. 'Why have two humans died of heart attack here?' is the most they can ask him, and Porkey will rub his hands and say 'Bad climate.'"

But what Porky Porcellus really said was:

"Fine man, why do you play like a boy on top of that thing? Is that any way for a hopeful asteroid agent to conduct himself?"

"Porcellus, you think you've trapped me, do you?" flared Netter.

"I trap you? My hands are clean. Is it my fault that two humans develop the strange mania of running themselves to death in a weird game?"

How far away was Porcellus from the edge of the dome? Too far. Too far by several yards.

"Porcellus, what is this thing?" Netter cried out.

"Once it was a beam sphere, as you have probably guessed, and it is obsolete. I have altered it to something else. Now it is an intelligence test. To fail it is to die."

"Did anyone ever get off it?" Netter called. He had to get Porcellus interested. He had to get him to come several feet closer before he turned away.

"Only one passed the intelligence test," said the creature, "and he had unusual natural advantages. He was a peculiar fellow of the species Larrik who visited me some basic years ago. He simply broke himself into two pieces and walked off in opposite directions. The globe couldn't compensate for both of them. One got clear, obtained a line, pulled his other half off; both halves laughed at me, and then they rejoined

themselves. But you haven't his advantage, Netter. You have failed the test."

"I'll find a way," swore Netter. "I'll find a trick." Just a little bit closer now would do it.

"You lose, Netter," said Porcellus. "There is no fixed thing on the plain you could tie to even if you had a way of reaching it. The longest thing you have with you is what you call the romal, and it's no longer than your arm.

Porcellus was close enough. Right at the end of the dome. When he turned it would be perfect — somewhere between thirty-two and thirty-five feet. There was no fixed thing on the plain, but there was a thing heavy enough to serve for a fixed thing. The romal of Netter was no longer than his arm, but it was a romal rey, a king romal.

Porcellus turned away in his triumph. The light-thin lariat flew and dropped over his bulk. And Netter pulled himself off the dome in less time than you can say Porky Porcellus.

The fat hulk was no match for Netter when he was on solid non-compensating ground. He hog-tied the Hog-man with the thin leather line and rolled him onto the dome. And Porcellus was immediately on the center top of the dome to stay there till he died of hunger or uncommon exertion or porcine apoplexy.

Netter was moving things about in the fine Trophy Room which he had recently inherited. He set a fine hard wood peg into the wall and hung on it the king romal for which he now had especial affection. The king romal is so intricately braided that one moment it will be a thick quirt no longer than your arm; but unlace one keeper and it immediately becomes a thin strand lariat forty foot long counting the loop. Hardly anyone knows how to braid a romal rey nowadays.

He moved many things in the trophy room. He wanted the set thing to be just right. He knew just what space it should occupy on that great wall. The investigation was over with and Netter's claim had been accepted. He was now asteroid station-master — a good job.

The head was ready. It had been cured out and tanned and treated, and the eye-tushers were polished till they gleamed.

Porcellus had a truly magnificent head!

## SLOW TUESDAY NIGHT

A panhandler intercepted the young couple as they strolled down the night street.

“Preserve us this night,” he said as he touched his hat to them, “and could you good people advance me a thousand dollars to be about the recouping of my fortunes?”

“I gave you a thousand last Friday,” said the young man.

“Indeed you did,” the panhandler replied, “and I paid you back tenfold by messenger before midnight”

“That’s right, George, he did,” said the young woman. “Give it to him, dear. I believe he’s a good sort.”

So the young man gave the panhandler a thousand dollars, and the panhandler touched his hat to them in thanks and went on to the recouping of his fortunes.

As he went into Money Market, the panhandler passed Ildefonsa Impala, the most beautiful woman in the city.

“Will you marry me this night, Ildy?” he asked cheerfully.

“Oh, I don’t believe so, Basil,” she said. “I marry you pretty often, but tonight I don’t seem to have any plans at all. You may make me a gift on your first & second, however. I always like that.”

But when they had parted she asked herself: “But whom will I marry tonight?”

The panhandler was Basil Bagelbaker, who would be the richest man in the world within an hour and a half. He would make and lose four fortunes within eight hours; and these not the little fortunes that ordinary men acquire, but titanic things.

When the Abebajos block had been removed from Human minds, people began to make decisions faster, And often better. It had been the mental stutter. When it was understood what it was, and that it had no useful function, it was removed by simple childhood metasurgery.

Transportation and manufacturing had then become practically instantaneous. Things that had once taken months and years now took only minutes and hours. A person could have one or several pretty intricate careers within an eight-hour period.

Freddy Fixico had just invented a manus module. Freddy was a Nyctalops, and the modules were characteristic of these people. The

people had then divided themselves — according to their natures and inclinations — into the Auroreans, the Hemerobians, and the Nyctalops — or the Dawners, who had their most active hours from four A.M. till noon; the Day-Flies, who obtained from noon to eight P.M.; and the Night-Seers, whose civilization thrived from eight P.M. to four A.M. The cultures, inventions, markets and activities of these three folk were a little different. As a Nyctalops, Freddy had just begun his working day at eight P.M. on a slow Tuesday night; Freddy rented an office and had it furnished. This took one minute, negotiation, selection and installation being almost instantaneous. Then he invented the manus module; that took another minute. He then had it manufactured and marketed; in three minutes it was in the hands of key buyers.

It caught on. It was an attractive module. The flow of orders began within thirty seconds. By ten minutes after eight every important person had one of the new manus modules, and the trend had been set. The module began to sell in the millions. It was one of the most interesting fads of the night, or at least the early part of the night.

Manus modules had no practical function, no more than had Sameki verses. They were attractive, of a psychologically satisfying size and shape, and could be held in the hands, set on a table, or installed in a module niche of any wall.

Naturally Freddy became very rich. Ildefonsa Impala, the most beautiful woman in the city, was always interested in newly rich men. She came to see Freddy about eight-thirty. People made up their minds fast, and Ildefonsa had hers made up when she came. Freddy made his own up quickly and divorced Judy Fixico in Small Claims Court. Freddy and Ildefonsa went honeymooning to Paraiso Dorado, a resort.

It was wonderful. All of Ildy's marriages were. There was the wonderful floodlighted scenery. The recirculated water of the famous falls was tinted gold; the immediate rocks had been done by Rambles; and the hills had been contoured by Spall. The beach was a perfect copy of that at Merevale, and the popular drink that first part of the night was blue absinthe.

But scenery — whether seen for the first time or revisited after an interval — is string for the sudden intense view of it. It is not meant to be lingered over. Food, selected and prepared instantly, is eaten with swift enjoyment; and blue absinthe lasts no longer than its own novelty.

Loving, for Ildefonsa and her paramours, was quick and consuming; and repetition would have been pointless to her. Besides, Ildefonsa and Freddy had taken only the one-hour luxury honeymoon.

Freddy wished to continue the relationship, but Ildefonsa glanced at a trend indicator. The manus module would hold its popularity for only the first third of the night. Already it had been discarded by people who mattered. And Freddy Fixico was not one of the regular successes. He enjoyed a full career only about one night a week.

They were back in the city and divorced in Small Claims Court by nine thirty-five. The stock of manus modules was remandered, and the last of it would be disposed to bargain hunters among the Dawners, who will buy anything.

“Whom shall I marry next?” Ildefonsa asked herself. “It looks like a slow night.”

“Bagelbaker is buying,” ran the word through Money Market, but Bagelbaker was selling again before the word had made its rounds. Basil Bagelbaker enjoyed making money, and it was a pleasure to watch him work as he dominated the floor of the Market and assembled runners and a competent staff out of the corner of his mouth. Helpers stripped the panhandler rags off him and wrapped him in a tycoon toga. He sent one runner to pay back twentyfold the young couple who had advanced him a thousand dollars. He sent another with a more substantial gift to Ildefonsa Impala, for Basil cherished their relationship. Basil acquired title to the Trend Indication Complex and had certain falsifications set into it. He caused to collapse certain industrial empires that had grown up within the last two hours, and made a good thing of recombining their wreckage. He had been the richest man in the world for some minutes now. He became so money-heavy that he could not maneuver with the agility he had shown an hour before. He became a great fat buck, and the pack of expert wolves circled him to bring him down.

Very soon he would lose that first fortune of the evening. The secret of Basil Bagelbaker is that he enjoyed losing money spectacularly after he was full of it to the bursting point.

A thoughtful man named Maxwell Mouser had just produced a work of actinic philosophy. It took him seven minutes to write it. To write works of philosophy one used the flexible outlines and the idea indexes; one set the activator for such a wordage in each subsection; an adept

would use the paradox feed-in, and the striking-analogy blender; one calibrated the particular-slant and the personality-signature. It had to come out a good work, for excellence had become the automatic minimum for such productions.

“I will scatter a few nuts on the frosting,” said Maxwell, and he pushed the lever for that. This sifted handfuls of words like chthonic and heuristic and prozymeides through the thing so that nobody could doubt it was a work of philosophy.

Maxwell Mouser sent the work out to publishers, and received it back each time in about three minutes. An analysis of it and reason for rejection was always given — mostly that the thing had been done before and better. Maxwell received it back ten times in thirty minutes, and was discouraged. Then there was a break.

Ladion’s work had become a hit within the last ten minutes, and it was now recognized that Mouser’s monograph was both an answer and a supplement to it. It was accepted and published in less than a minute after this break. The reviews of the first five minutes were cautious ones; then real enthusiasm was shown. This was truly one of the greatest works of philosophy to appear during the early and medium hours of the night. There were those who said it might be one of the enduring works and even have a holdover appeal to the Dawners the next morning.

Naturally Maxwell became very rich, and naturally Ildefonsa came to see him about midnight. Being a revolutionary philosopher, Maxwell thought that he might make some free arrangement, but Ildefonsa insisted it must be marriage. So Maxwell divorced Judy Mouser in Small Claims Court and went off with Ildefonsa.

This Judy herself, though not so beautiful as Ildefonsa, was the fastest taker in the city. She only wanted the men of the moment for a moment, and she was always there before even Ildefonsa. Ildefonsa believed that she took the men away from Judy; Judy said that Ildy had her leavings and nothing else.

“I had him first,” Judy would always mock as she raced through Small Claims Court.

“Oh that damned urchin!” Ildefonsa would moan. “She wears my very hair before I do.”

Maxwell Mouser and Ildefonsa Impala went honeymooning to Musicbox Mountain, a resort. It was wonderful. The peaks were done

with green snow by Dunbar and Fittle. (Back at Money Market Basil Bagebaker was puffing together his third and greatest fortune of the night, which might surpass in magnitude even his fourth fortune of the Thursday before.) The chalets were Switzier than the real Swiss and had live oats in every room. (And Stanley Skuldugger was emerging as the top Actor-Imago of the middle hours of the night.) The popular drink for that middle part of the night was Glotzenglubber, Eve Cheese and Rhine wine over pink ice. (And back in the city the leading Nyctalops were taking their midnight break at the Toppers' Club.)

Of course it was wonderful, as were all of Ildefonsa's — But she had never been really up on philosophy so she had scheduled only the special thirty-five-minute honeymoon. She looked at the trend indicator to be sure. She found that her current husband had been obsoleted, and his opus was now referred to sneeringly as Mouser's Mouse. They went back to the city and were divorced in Small Claims Court.

The membership of the Toppers' Club varied. Success was the requisite of membership. Basil Bagelbaker might be accepted as a member, elevated to the presidency and expelled from it as a dirty pauper from three to six times a night. But only important persons could belong to it, or those enjoying brief moments of importance.

"I believe I will sleep during the Dawner period in the morning," Overcall said. "I may go up to this new place, Koimopolis, for an hour of it. They're said to be good. Where will you sleep, Basil?"

"Flop house."

"I believe I will sleep an hour by the Midian Method," said Burnbanner. "They have a fine new clinic. And perhaps I'll sleep an hour by the Prasenka Process, and an hour by the Dormidjo."

"Crackle has been sleeping an hour every period by the natural method," said Overcall.

"I did that for half an hour not long since," said Burnbanner. "I believe an hour is too long to give it. Have you tried the natural method, Basil?"

"Always. Natural method and a bottle of red-eye."

Stanley Skuldugger had become the most meteoric actor-imago for a week. Naturally he became very rich, and Ildefonsa Impala went to see him about three A.M.

"I had him first!" rang the mocking voice of Judy Skuldugger as she skipped through her divorce in Small Claims Court. And Ildefonsa and



Stanley-boy went off honeymooning. It is always fun to finish up a period with an actor-imagó who is the hottest property in the business. There is something so adolescent and boorish about them.

Besides, there was the publicity, and Ildefonsa liked that. The rumor-mills ground. Would it last ten minutes? Thtrty? An hour? Would it be one of those rare Nyctalops marriages that lasted through the rest of the night and into the daylight off-hours? Would it even last into the next night as some had been known to do?

Actually it lasted nearly forty minutes, which was almost to the end of the period.

It had been a slow Tuesday night. A few hundred new products had run their course on the market. There had been a score of dramatic hits, three-minute and five-minute capsule dramas, and several of the six minute long-play affairs. Night Street Nine — a solidly sordid offering — seemed to be in as the drama of the night unless there should be a late hit.

Hundred-storied buildings had been erected, occupied, obsoleted, and demolished again to make room for more contemporary structures. Only the mediocre would use a building that had been left over from the Day Fliers or the Dawners, or even the Nyctalops of the night before. The city was rebuilt pretty completely at least three times during an eight-hour period.

The period drew near its end. Basil Bagelbaker, the richest man in the world, the reigning president of the Toppers' Club, was enjoying himself with his cronies. His fourth fortune of the night was a paper pyramid that had risen to incredible heights; but Basil laughed himself as he savored the manipulation it was founded on.

Three ushers of the Toppers' Club came in with firm step.

"Get out of here, you dirty bum," they told Basil savagely. They tore the tycoon's toga off him and then tossed him his seedy panhandler's rags with a three-man sneer.

"All gone?" Basil asked. "I gave it another five minutes."

"All gone," said a messenger from Money Market. "Nine billion gone in five minutes, and it really pulled some others down with it."

"Pitch the busted bum out!" howled Overcall and Burnbanner and the other cronies.

"Wait, Basil," said Overcall. "Turn in the President's Crosier before we

kick you downstairs. After all, you'll have it several times again tomorrow night."

The period was over. The Nyctalops drifted off to sleep clinics or leisure-hour hideouts to pass their ebb time. The Auroreans, the Dawners, took over the vital stuff.

Now you would see some action! Those Dawners really made fast decisions. You wouldn't catch them wasting a full minute setting up a business.

A sleepy panhandler met Ildefonsa Impala on the way.

"Preserve us this morning, Ildy," he said, "and will you marry in the coming night?"

"Likely I will, Basil," she told him. "Did you marry Judy during the night past?"

"I'm not sure. Could you let me have two dollars, Ildy?"

"Out of the question. I believe a Judy Bagelbaker was named one of the ten best-dressed women during the frou-frou fashion period about two o'clock. Why do you need two dollars?"

"A dollar for a bed and a dollar for red-eye. After all, I sent you two million out of my second."

"I keep my two sorts of accounts separate. Here's a dollar, Basil. Now be off! I can't be seen talking to a dirty panhandler."

"Thank you, Ildy. I'll get the red-eye and sleep in an alley. Preserve us this morning."

Bagelbaker shuffled off whistling "Slow Tuesday Night."

And already the Dawners had set Wednesday morning to jumping.

## GUESTING TIME

Things were a bit crowded where they came from — and were getting that way here!

Winston, the Civil Servant in Immigration and Arrivals, was puzzled when he came that morning. There were several hundred new people behind the cyclone fences, and no arrivals had been scheduled.

“What ships landed?” he called out. “Why were they unscheduled?”

“No ships landed, sir,” said Potholder, the senior guard.

“Then how did these people get here? Walk down from the sky?” Winston asked snappishly.

“Yes, sir, I guess so. We don’t know who they are or how they keep coming here. They say they are from Skandia.”

“We have few Scandinavian arrivals, and none of such appearance as this,” said Winston. “How many are there?”

“Well, sir, when we first noticed them there were seven, and they hadn’t been there a moment before.”

“Seven? You’re crazy There are hundreds.”

“Yes, sir. I’m crazy. A minute after there were seven, there were seventeen. But no more had come from anywhere. Then there were sixty. We separated them into groups of ten and watched them very closely. None crossed from one group to another, none came from anywhere else. But soon there were fifteen, then twenty-five, then thirty in each group. And there’s a lot more of them there now than when you started to talk to me a moment ago, Mr. Winston.”

“Corcoran is my superior and will be here in a minute,” Winston said. “He’ll know what to do.”

“Mr. Corcoran left just before you arrived, sir,” said Potholder. “He watched it a while, and then went away babbling.”

“I always admired his quick grasp of a situation,” said Winston. He also went away babbling.

There were about a thousand of those Skandia people, and a little later there were nine times that many. They weren’t dowdy people, but the area wouldn’t hold any more. The fences all went down, and the Skandias spread out into the city and towns and country. This was only the beginning of it. About a million of them materialized there that morning, then the same thing happened at ten thousand other Ports of Entry of

Earth.

“Mama,” said Trixie, “there are some people here who want to use our bathroom.” This was Beatrice (Trixie) Trux, a little girl in the small town of Winterfield.

“What an odd request!” said Mrs. Trux. “But I suppose it is in the nature of an emergency. Let them in, Trixie. How many people are there?”

“About a thousand,” said Trixie.

“Trixie, there can’t be that many.”

“All right, you count them.”

All the people came in to use the Trux’s bathroom. There were somewhat more than a thousand of them, and it took them quite a while to use the bathroom even though they put a fifteen-second limit on each one and had a timekeeper with a bell to enforce it. They did it all with a lot of laughter and carrying on, but it took that first bunch about five hours to go through, and by that time there were a lot more new ones waiting.

“This is a little unusual,” Mrs. Trux said to some of the Skandia women. “I was never short on hospitality. It is our physical resources, not our willingness, that becomes strained. There are so many of you!”

“Don’t give it a thought,” the Skandia women said. “It is the intent that counts, and it was so kind of you people to invite us. We seldom get a chance to go anywhere. We came a little early, but the main bunch will be along very soon. Don’t you just love to go visiting.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Mrs. Trux. “I never realized till now just how much I wanted to go visiting.”

But when she saw the whole outdoors black with the new people, Mrs. Trux decided that she had better stay where she was.

Truman Trux was figuring with a pencil.

“Our lot is fifty feet by a hundred and fifty feet, Jessica,” he said. “That is either 7,500 or 75,000 square feet depending on how many zeroes you carry it out to.”

“You were always good at math,” said Mrs. Trux. “How do you do it anyhow?”

“And do you know how many people are living with us here on this lot, Jessica?” Truman asked.

“Quite a few.”

“I am guessing between six and seven thousand,” said Truman. “I found several more blocks of them this morning that I didn’t know about. They have a complete city built in our back yard. The streets are two and a half feet wide; the houses are eight feet by eight feet with six foot ceilings, and most of them are nine stories high. Whole families live in each room and cook there besides. They have shops and bazaars set up. They even have factories built. I know there is an entire wholesale textile district in our back yard. There are thirteen taverns and five music halls in our yard to my own knowledge, and there may be more.”

“Well, some of those places are pretty small, Truman. The Little Hideout is the broom closet of the Big Hideout, and I don’t know if we should count it as a separate tavern. You have to go into the Sideways Club side-ways; the Thinman Club is only nine inches wide from wall to wall and it’s quite a trick to bending an elbow there; and the Mouse Room is small. But the better clubs are up in our attic, Truman. Did you ever count them? The Crazy Man Cabaret is up there, and the After Hours Club. Most of the other attic clubs are key clubs and I’m not a member. They’ve set up the Skandia Art Theater in our basement now, you know. They have continuous performances.”

“I know it, Jessica, I know it.”

“Their comedies are so funny that I nearly die. The trouble is that it’s so crowded there that you have to laugh in when the one next to you laughs out. And I cry just like they do at their tragedies. They’re all about women who can’t have any more children. Why don’t we have a bunch more, Truman? There’s more than twenty shops in our yard where they sell nothing but fertility charms. I wonder why there aren’t any children with the Skandia?”

“Ah, they say that this is just a short first visit by a few of them and they didn’t presume to bring their children with them. What is that new racket superimposed on the old?”

“Oh, that’s the big drums and the cymbals. They’re having a political campaign to elect temporary officials for the time of their visit here. Imperial City, that’s the town in our yard, and our house, will elect delegates to go to Congress to represent this whole block; The elections will be tonight. Then we’ll really hear some noise, they say. The big drums don’t really waste space, Truman. There are people inside them and they play them from the inside. Some of our neighbors are getting a little fussy

about the newcomers, but I always did like a house full of people.”

“We have it now, Jessica. I never got used to sleeping in a bed with nine other people, even if they are quiet sleepers. I like people, and I am fond of new experiences. But it is getting crowded.”

“We have more of the Skandia than anyone else in the block except the Skirveys. They say it’s because they like us more than some of the others. Mamie Skirvey is taking four kinds of the fertility pills now. She is almost sure she will be able to have triplets. I want to too.”

“All the stores are stripped, Jessica, and all the lumber yards and lumber camps; and the grain elevators will be empty in two more days. The Skandia pay for everything in money, but nobody knows what it says on it I haven’t got used to walking on men and women when I go out, but there’s no avoiding it since the ground is covered with them.”

“They don’t mind. They’re used to it. They say it’s crowded where they come from.”

The Winterfield Times-Tribune Telegraph had a piece about the Skandia:

The plain fact is that for two days the Earth has had ten billion visitors from Skandia, wherever that is. The plain fact is that the Earth will die of them within a week. They appear by invisible transportation, but they have shown no inclination to disappear in the same manner. Food will be gone, the very air we breathe will be gone. They speak all our languages, they are polite, friendly and agreeable. And we will perish from them.

A big smiling man broke in on Bar-John, who was once again president of Big State Amalgamated, former U.S.A.

“I’m the president of the Skandia Visitation,” he boomed. “We have come partly to instruct you people and we find that you do need it. Your fertility rate is pathetic. You barely double in fifty years. Your medicine, adequate in other fields, is worse than childish in this. We find that some of the nostrums peddled to your people actually impede fertility. Well, get in the Surgeon General and a few of the boys and we’ll begin to correct the situation.”

“Gedoudahere,” said President Bar-John.

“I know you will not want your people to miss out on the population blessing,” said the Skandia Visitation President. “We can aid you. We want you to be as happy as we are.”

“Jarvis! Cudgelman! Sapsucker!” President Bar-John called out.

“Shoot down this man. I’ll implement the paper work on it later.”

“You always say that but you never do,” Sapsucker complained. “It’s been getting us in a lot of trouble.”

“Oh, well, don’t shoot him down then if you’re going to make an issue of it. I long for the old days when the simple things were done simply. Dammit, you Skandia skinner, do you know that there are nine thousand of you in the White House itself?”

“We intend to improve that this very hour,” the Skandia president said. “We can erect one, two, or even three decks in these high-ceilinged rooms. I am happy to say that we will have thirty thousand of our people quartered in the White House this night.”

“Do you think I like to take a bath with eight other persons — not even registered voters — in the same tub?” President Bar-John complained. “Do you think I like to eat off a plate shared by three or four other people? Or to shave, by mistake, faces other than my own in the morning?”

“I don’t see why not,” said the Skandia Visitation president. “People are our most precious commodity. Presidents are always chosen as being those who most love the people.”

“Oh, come on, fellows,” said President Bar-John. “Shoot down the ever-loving son. We’re entitled to a free one now and then.”

Jarvis and Cudgelman and Sapsucker blazed away at the Skandia, but they harmed him not at all.

“You should have known that we are immune to that,” the Skandia said. “We voted against its effect years ago. Well, since you will not cooperate, I will go direct to your people. Happy increase to you, gentlemen.”

Truman Trux, having gone out from his own place for a little change, was sitting on a park bench.

He wasn’t actually sitting on it, but several feet above it. In that particular place, a talkative Skandia lady sat on the bench itself. On her lap sat a sturdy Skandia man reading the Sporting News and smoking a pipe. On him sat a younger Skandia woman. On this younger woman sat Truman Trux, and on him sat a dark Skandia girl who was filing her fingernails and humming a tune. On her in turn sat an elderly Skandia man. As crowded as things had become, one could not expect a seat of one’s own.

A fellow and his girl came along, walking on the people on the grass.

Mind if we get on?" asked the girl.

"Quite all right," said the elderly gentleman on top. "Sall right," said the girl working on her nails. "Certainly," said Truman and the others, and the Sporting News man puffed into his pipe that it was perfectly agreeable.

There was no longer any motor traffic. People walked closely packed on streets and sidewalks. The slow stratum was the lowest, then the medium, then the fast (walking on the shoulders of the mediums and combining the three speeds). At crossings it became rather intricate, and people were sometimes piled nine high. But the Earth people, those who still went out, quickly got onto the Skandia techniques.

An Earthman, known for his extreme views, had mounted onto a monument in the park and began to harangue the people, Earth and Skandia. Truman Trux, who wanted to see and hear, managed to get a nice fifth-level seat, sitting on the shoulders of a nice Skandia girl, who sat on the shoulders of another who likewise to the bottom.

"Ye are the plague of locusts!" howled the Earth-side crank. "Ye have stripped us bare!"

"The poor man!" said the Skandia girl who was Truman's understeady. "He likely has only a few children and is embittered."

"Ye have devoured our substance and stolen the very air of our life. Ye are the Apocalyptical grasshoppers, the eleventh plague."

"Here is a fertility charm for your wife," said the Skandia girl, and reached it up to Truman. "You might not need it yet, but keep it for the future. It is for those who have more than twelve. The words in Skandia say 'Why stop now?' it is very efficacious."

"Thank you," said Truman. "My wife has many charms from you good people, but not one like this. We have only one child, a young girl."

"What a shame! Here is a charm for your daughter. She cannot begin to use them too early."

"Destruction, destruction, destruction on ye all!" screamed the Earth-side crank from atop the monument.

"Quite an adept," said the Skandia girl. "To what school of eloquence does he belong?"

The crowd began to break up and move off. Truman felt himself taken down one level and then another.

"Any particular direction?" asked the Skandia girl. "This is fine," said



Truman. "We're going toward my home."

"Why, here's a place almost clear," said the girl. "You'd never find anything like this at home." They were now down to the last level, the girl walking only on the horizontal bodies of those lounging on the grass. "You can get off and walk if you wish," said the girl. "Here's a gap in the walkers you can slip down into. Well, toodle."

"You mean toodle-oo?" Truman asked as he slid off her shoulders.

"That's right. I can never remember the last part of it."

The Skandia were such friendly people!

President Bar-John and a dozen other regents of the world had decided that brusqueness was called for. Due to the intermingling of Earth and Skandia populations, this would be a task for small and medium arms. The problem would be to gather the Skandia together in open spots, but on the designated day they began to gather of themselves in a million parks and plazas of the Earth. It worked perfectly. Army units were posted everywhere and went into action.

Rifles began to whistle and machine guns to chatter. But the effect on the Skandia was not that expected.

Instead of falling wounded, they cheered everywhere.

"Pyrotechnics yet!" exclaimed a Skandia leader, mounting onto the monument in one park. "Oh, we are honored!"

But, though the Skandia did not fall from the gunshot, they had begun to diminish in their numbers. They were disappearing as mysteriously as they had appeared a week before.

"We go now, said the Skandia leader from the top of the monument. "We have enjoyed every minute of our short visit. Do not despair! We will not abandon you to your emptiness. Our token force will return home and report. In another week we will visit you in substantial numbers. We will teach you the full happiness of human proximity, the glory of fruitfulness, the blessing of adequate population. We will teach you to fill up the horrible empty places of your planet."

The Skandia were thinning out. The last of them were taking cheering farewells of disconsolate Earth friends.

"We will be back," they said as they passed their last fertility charms into avid hands. "We'll be back and teach you everything so you can be as happy as we are. Good increase to you!"

"Good increase to you!" cried the Earth people to the disappearing

Skandia. Oh, it would be a lonesome world without all those nice people! With them you had the feeling that they were really close to you.

“We’ll be back!” said the Skandia leader, and disappeared from the monument. “We’ll be back next week and a lot more of us,” and then they were gone.

“— And next time we’ll bring the kids!” came the last fading Skandia voice from the sky.

## IN OUR BLOCK

There were a lot of funny people in that block.

“You ever walk down that street?” Art Slick asked Jim Boomer, who had just come onto him there.

“Not since I was a boy. After the overall factory burned down, there was a faith healer had his tent pitched there one summer. The street’s just one block long and it dead-ends on the railroad embankment. Nothing but a bunch of shanties and weed-filled lots. The shanties looked different today, though, and there seem to be more of them. I thought they pulled them all down a few months ago.”

“Jim, I’ve been watching that first little building for two hours. There was a tractor-truck there this morning with a forty-foot trailer, and it loaded out of that little shanty. Cartons about eight inches by eight inches by three feet came down that chute. They weighed about thirty-five pounds each from the way the men handled them. Jim, they filled that trailer up with them, and then pulled it off.”

“What’s wrong with that, Art?”

“Jim, I said they filled that trailer up. From the drag on it it had about a sixty-thousand-pound load when it pulled out. They loaded a carton every three and a half seconds for two hours; that’s two thousand cartons.”

“Sure, lots of trailers run over the load limit nowadays; they don’t enforce it very well.”

“Jim, that shack’s no more than a cracker box seven feet on a side. Half of it is taken up by a door, and inside a man in a chair behind a small table. You couldn’t get anything else in that half. The other half is taken up by whatever that chute comes out of. You could pack six of those little shacks on that trailer.”

“Let’s measure it,” Jim Boomer said. “Maybe it’s bigger than it looks.” The shack had a sign on it: Make Sell Ship Anything Cut Price. Jim Boomer measured the building with an old steel tape. The shack was a seven-foot cube, and there were no hidden places. It was set up on a few piers of broken bricks, and you could see under it.

“Sell you a new fifty-foot steel tape for a dollar,” said the man in the chair in the little shack. “Throw that old one away.” The man pulled a steel tape out of a drawer of his table-desk, though Art Slick was sure it

had been a plain flat-top table with no place for a drawer.

“Fully retractable, rhodium-plated, Dort glide, Ramsey swivel, and it forms its own caring case. One dollar,” the man said.

Jim Boomer paid him a dollar for it. “How many of them you got?”

“I can have a hundred thousand ready to load out in ten minutes,” the man said. “Eighty-eight cents each in hundred thousand lots.”

“Was that a trailer-load of steel tapes you shipped out this morning?” Art asked the man.

“No that must have been something else. This is the first steel tape I ever made. Just got the idea when I saw you measuring my shack with that old beat-up one.”

Art Slick and Jim Boomer went to the rundown building next door. It was smaller, about a six-foot cube, and the sign said Public Stenographer. The clatter of a typewriter was coming from it, but the noise stopped when they opened the door.

A dark pretty girl was sitting in a chair before a small table. There was nothing else in the room, and no typewriter.

“I thought I heard a typewriter in here,” Art said.

“Oh that is me.” The girl smiled. “Sometimes I amuse myself make typewriter noises like a public stenographer is supposed to.”

“What would you do if someone came in to have some typing done?”

“What are you think? I do it of course.

“Could you type a letter for me?”

“Sure is can, man friend, two bits a page, good work, carbon copy, envelope and stamp.”

“Ah, let’s see how you do it. I will dictate to you while you type.”

“You dictate first. Then I write. No sense mix up two things at one time.

Art dictated a long and involved letter that he had been meaning to write for several days. He felt like a fool droning it to the girl as she filed her nails. “Why is public stenographer always sit filing her nails?” she asked as Art droned. “But I try to do it right, file them and grow them out again, then file them down some more. Been doing it all morning. It seems silly.”

“Ah — that is all,” Art said when he had finished dictating.

“Not P.S. Love and Kisses?” the girl asked.

“Hardly. It’s a business letter to a person I barely know.”

“I always say P.S. Love and Kisses to persons I barely know,” the girl said. “Your letter will make three pages, six bits. Please you both step outside about ten seconds and I write it. Can’t do it when you watch.” She pushed them out and closed the door.

Then there was silence.

“What are you doing in there, girl?” Art called.

“Want I sell you a memory course too? You forget already? I type a letter,” the girl called.

“But I don’t hear a typewriter going.”

“What is? You want verisimilitude too? I should charge extra.” There was a giggle, and then the sound of very rapid typing for about five seconds.

The girl opened the door and handed Art the three page letter. It was typed perfectly, of course.

“There is something a little odd about this,” Art said.

“Oh? The ungrammar of the letter is your own, sir. Should I have correct?”

“No. It is something else. Tell me the truth, girl: how does the man next door ship out trailer-loads of material from a building ten times too small to hold the stuff?”

“He cuts prices.”

“Well, what are you people? The man next door resembles you.”

“My brother-uncle. We tell everybody we are Innominee Indians.”

“There is no such tribe,” Jim Boomer said flatly.

“Is there not? Then we will have to tell people we are something else. You got to admit it sounds like Indian. What’s the best Indian to be?”

“Shawnee,” said Jim Boomer.

“Okay then we be Shawnee Indians. See how easy it is.”

“We’re already taken,” Boomer said. “I’m a Shawnee and I know every Shawnee in town.”

“Hi cousin!” the girl cried, and winked. “That’s from a joke I learn, only the begin was different. See how foxy I turn all your questions.”

“I have two-bits coming out of my dollar,” Art said.

“I know,” the girl said. “I forgot for a minute what design is on the back of the two-bitser piece, so I stall while I remember it. Yes, the funny bird standing on the bundle of firewood. One moment till I finish it Here.” She handed the quarter to Art Slick. “And you tell everybody

there's a smoothie public stenographer here who types letters good."

"Without a typewriter," said Art Slick. "Let's go, Jim."

"P.S. Love and kisses," the girl called after them.

The Cool Man Club was next door, a small and shabby beer bar. The bar girl could have been a sister of the public stenographer.

"We'd like a couple of Buds, but you don't seem to have a stock of anything," Art said.

"Who needs stock?" the girl asked. "Here is beers." Art would have believed that she brought them out of her sleeves, but she had no sleeves. The beers were cold and good.

"Girl, do you know how the fellow on the corner can ship a whole trailer-load of material out of a space that wouldn't hold a tenth of it?" Art asked the girl.

"Sure. He makes it and loads it out at the same time. That way it doesn't take up space, like if he made it before time."

"But he has to make it out of something," Jim Boomer cut in.

"No, no," the girl said. "I study your language. I know words. Out of something is to assemble, not to make. He makes."

"This is funny." Slick gaped. "Budweiser is misspelled on this bottle, the i before the e."

"Oh, I goof," the bar girl said. "I couldn't remember which way it goes so I make it one way on one bottle and the other way on the other. Yesterday a man ordered a bottle of Progress beer, and I spelled it Progers on the bottle. Sometimes I get things wrong. Here, I fix yours.

She ran her hand over the label, and then it was spelled correctly.

"But that thing is engraved and then reproduced," Slick protested.

"Oh, sure, all fancy stuff like that," the girl said. "I got to be more careful. One time I forget and make Jax-taste beer in a Schlitz bottle and the man didn't like it. I had to swish swish change the taste while I pretended to give him a different bottle. One time I forgot and produced a green-bottle beer in a brown bottle, 'It is the light in here, it just makes it look brown,' I told the man. Hell, we don't even have a light in here. I go swish fast and make the bottle green. It's hard to keep from making mistake when you're stupid."

"No, you don't have a light or a window in here, and it's light," Slick said. "You don't have refrigeration. There are no power lines to any of the shanties in this block. How do you keep the beer cold?"

“Yes, is the beer not nice and cold? Notice how tricky I evade your question. Will you good men have two more beers?”

“Yes, we will. And I’m interested in seeing where you get them,” Slick said.

“Oh look, is snakes behind you!” the girl cried. “Oh how you startle and jump!” she laughed. “It’s all joke. Do you think I will have snakes in my nice bar?”

But she had produced two more beers, and the place was as bare as before.

“How long have you tumble-bugs been in this block?” Boomer asked.

“Who keep track?” the girl said. “People come and go.”

“You’re not from around here,” Slick said. “You’re not from anywhere I know. Where do you come from? Jupiter?”

“Who wants Jupiter?” the girl seemed indignant. “Do business with a bunch of insects there, is all! Freeze your tail too.”

“You wouldn’t be a kidder, would you, girl?” Slick asked.

“I sure do try hard. I learn a lot of jokes but I tell them all wrong yet. I get better, though. I try to be the witty bar girl so people will come back.”

“what’s in the shanty next door toward the tracks?”

“My cousin-sister,” said the girl. “She set up shop just today. She grow any color hair on bald-headed men. I tell her she’s crazy. No business. If they wanted hair they wouldn’t be bald-headed in the first place.”

“Well, can she grow hair on bald-headed men?” Slick asked.

“Oh sure. Can’t you?”

There were three or four more shanty shops in the block. It didn’t seem that there had been that many when the men went into the Cool Man club.

“I don’t remember seeing this shack a few minutes ago,” Boomer said to the man standing in front of the last shanty on the line.

“Oh, I just made it,” the man said.

Weathered boards, rusty nails... and he had just made it.

“Why didn’t you - ah — make a decent building while you were at it?” Slick asked.

“This is more inconspicuous,” the man said. “Who notices when an old building appears suddenly? We’re new here and want to feel our way in before we attract attention. Now I’m trying to figure out what to make. Do you. think there is a market for a luxury automobile to sell for a

hundred dollars? I suspect I would have to respect the local religious feeling when I make them though.”

“What is that?” Slick asked.

“Ancestor worship. The old gas tank and fuel system still carried as vestiges after natural power is available. Oh’ well, I’ll put them in. I’ll have one done in about three minutes if you want to wait.”

“No. I’ve already got a car,” Slick said. “Let’s go, Jim.”

That was the last shanty in the block, so they turned back.

“I was just wondering what was down in this block where nobody ever goes,” Slick said. “There’s a lot of odd corners in our town if you look them out.”

“There are some queer guys in the shanties that were here before this bunch,” Boomer said. “Some of them used to come up to the Red Rooster to drink. One of them could gobble like a turkey. One of them could roll one eye in one direction and the other eye the other way. They shoveled hulls at the cottonseed oil float before it burned down.”

They went by the public stenographer shack again.

“No kidding, honey, how do you type without a typewriter?” Slick asked.

“Typewriter is too slow,” the girl said.

“I asked how, not why,” Slick said.

“I know. Is it not nifty the way I turn away a phrase? I think I will have a big oak tree growing in front of my shop tomorrow for shade. Either of you nice men have an acorn in your pocket?”

“Ah — no, How do you really do the typing, girl?”

“You promise you won’t tell anybody.”

“I promise.”

“I make the marks with my tongue,” the girl said. They started slowly on up the block.

“Hey, how do you make the carbon copies?” Jim Boomer called back.

“With my other tongue,” the girl said.

There was another forty-foot trailer loading out of the first shanty in the block. It was bundles of half-inch plumbers’ pipe coming out of the chute — in twenty-foot lengths. Twenty-foot rigid pipe out of a seven-foot shed.

“I wonder how he can sell trailer-loads of such stuff out of a little shack like that,” Slick puzzled, still not satisfied.



“Like the girl says, he cuts prices,” Boomer said. “Let’s go over to the Red Rooster and see if there’s anything going on. There always were a lot of funny people in that block.”

## HOG-BELLY HONEY

I'm Joe Spade — about as intellectual a guy as you'll find all day. I invented Wotto and Voxo and a bunch of other stuff that nobody can get along without anymore. It's on account of I have so much stuff in my head that I sometimes go to a head-grifter. This day all of them I know is out of town when I call. Lots of times every. body I know is out of town when I call. I go to a new one. The glass in his door says he is a anapsychologist, which is a head-grifter in the popular speech.

"I'm Joe Spade the man that got everything," I tell him and slap him on the back in that hearty way of mine. There is a crunch sound and at first I think I have crack his rib. Then I see I have only broke his glasses so no harm done. "I am what you call a flat-footed genius, Doc," I tell him, "with plenty of the crimp-cut greenleaf."

I take the check card away from him and mark it up myself to save time. I figure I know more about me than he does.

"Remember, I can get them nine-dollar words for four eighty-five wholesale, Doc," I josh him and he looks me painful.

"Modesty isn't one of your failings," this head-grifter tell me as he scun my card. "Hum. Single... Significant."

I had written down the "single" in the blank for it, but he had see for himself that I am a significant man.

"Solvent," he read for the blank about the pecuniary stuff; "I like that in a man. We will arrange for a few sessions."

"One will do it," I tell him. "Time is running and I am paying. Give me a quick read, Doc."

"Yes, I can give you a very rapid reading," he says. "I want you to ponder the ancient adage: It is not good for Man to be alone. Think about it a while, and perhaps you will be able to put one and one together."

Then he add kind of sad, "Poor woman!" which is either the non-secular of the year or else he is thinking of some other patient. Then he add again, "That will be three yards, in the lingo."

"Thanks, Doc," I say. I pay the head-grifter his three hundred dollars and leave. He has hit the nail on the noggin and put his toe on the root of my trouble.

I will take me a partner in my business.

I spot him in Grogley's, and I know right away he's the one. He's about

half my size but otherwise he's as much like me as two feet in one shoe. He's real good-looking — just like me. He's dressed sweet, but has a little blood on his face like can happen to anyone in Grogley's for five minutes. Man, we're twins! I know we will talk alike and think alike just like we look alike.

“Eheu! Fugaces!” my new partner says real sad. That means “Brother, this has been one day with all the bark on it!” He is drinking the Fancy and his eyes look like cracked glass.

“He's been having quite a few little fist fights,” Grogley whispers to me, “but he don't win none. He isn't fast with his hands. I think he's got troubles.”

“Not no more he don't,” I tell Grogley; “he's my new partner.”

I slap my new partner on the back in that hearty way I have, and the tooth that flew out must have been a loose one.

“You don't have no more troubles, Roscoe,” I tell him, “you and me is just become partners.” He looks kind of sick at me.

“Maurice is the name,” he says, “Maurice Maltravers. How are things back in the rocks? You, sir, are a troglodyte. They always come right after the snakes. That's the only time I wish the snakes would come back.”

Lots of people call me a troglodyte.

“Denied the sympathy of humankind,” Maurice carries on, “perhaps I may find it in an inferior species. I wonder if I could impose on your ears — gahhhh!” (he made a humorous sound there) “are those things ears? — What a fearsome otological apparatus you do have! — the burden of my troubles.”

“I just told you you don't have none, Maurice,” I say. “Come along with me and we'll get into the partner business.”

I pick him up by the scruff and haul him out of Grogley's.

“I see right away you are my kind of man,” I say. “My kind of man — putridus ad volva,” Maurice gives me the echo. Hey, this guy is a gale! Just like me.

“My cogitational patterns are so intricate and identatic oriented,” says Maurice when I set him down and let him walk a little, “that I become a closed system — unintelligible to the exocosmos and particularly to a chthonian like yourself.”

“I'm mental as hell myself, Maurice,” I tell him, “there ain't nothing the two of us can't do together.”

“My immediate difficulty is that the University has denied me further use of the computer,” Maurice tells me. “Without it, I cannot complete the Ultimate Machine.”

“I got a computer’ll make that little red schoolhouse turn green,” I tell him.

We come to my place which a man have call in print “a converted horse barn, probably the most unorthodox and badly appointed scientific laboratory in the world.” I take Maurice in with me, but he carries on like a chicken with its hat off when he finds out the only calculator I got is the one in my head.

“You livid monster, I can’t work in this mares’-nest,” he screeches at me. “I’ve got to have a calculator, a computer.”

I tap my head with a six-pound hammer and grin my famous grin. “It’s all inside here, Maurice boy,” I tell him, “the finest calculator in the world. When I was with the carnivals they billed me as the Idiot Genius. I run races with the best computers they had in a town, multiplying twenty-place numbers and all the little tricks like that. I cheated though. I invented a gadget and carried it in my pocket. It’s jam the relays of the best computers and slow them down for a full second. Give me a one-second hop and I can beat anything in the world at anything. The only things wrong with those jobs is that I had to talk and act kind of dumb to live up to my billing the idiot Genius, and that dumb stuff was hard on an intellectual like I.”

“I can see that it would be,” Maurice said. “Can you handle involuted matrix, Maimonides-conditioned, third-aspect numbers in the Cauchy sequence with simultaneous non-temporal involvement of the Fieschi manifold?”

“Maurice, I can do it and fry up a bunch of eggs to go with it at the same time,” I tell him. Then I look him right in the middle of the eye. “Maurice,” I say, “you’re working on a nullifier.”

He look at me like he take me serious for the first time. He pull a sheaf of papers out of his shirt, and sure enough he is working on a nullifier — a sweet one.

“This isn’t an ordinary nullifier,” Maurice points out, and I see that it ain’t. “What other nullifier can posit moral and ethical judgments? What other can set up and enforce categories? What other can really discern? This will be the only nullifier able to make full philosophical

pronouncements. Can you help me finish it, Proconsul?”

A proconsul is about the same as an alderman, so I know Maurice think high of me. We throw away the clock and get with it. We work about twenty hours a day. I compute it and build it at the same time — out of Wotto-metal naturally. At the end we use feedback a lot. We let the machine decide what we will put in it and what leave out. The main difference between our nullifier and all others is that ours will be able to make decisions. So, let it make them!

We finish it in about a week. Man, it is a sweet thing. We play with it a while to see what it can do. It can do everything.

I point it at half a bushel of bolts and nuts I got there. “Get rid of everything that ain’t standard thread,” I program it. “Half that stuff is junk.”

And half that stuff is gone right now! This thing works! Just set in what you want it to get rid of, and it’s gone without a trace.

“Get rid of everything here that’s no good for nothing,” I program it. I had me a place there that has been described as cluttered. That machine blinked once, and then I had a place you could get around in. That thing knew junk when it saw it, and it sure sent that no-good stuff clear over the edge. Of course anybody can make a nullifier that won’t leave no remains of whatever it latches on to, but this is the only one that knows what not to leave no remains of by itself. Maurice and me is tickled as pink rabbits over the thing.

“Maurice,” I say, and I slap him on the back so his nose bleeds a little, “this is one bushy-tailed gadget. There ain’t nothing we can’t do with it.”

But Maurice looks kind of sad for a moment.

“A quo bono?” he ask, which I think is the name of a mineral water, so I slosh him out some brandy which is better. He drink the brandy but he’s still thoughtful.

“But what good is it?” he ask. “It is a triumph, of course, but in what category could we market it? It seems that I’ve been here a dozen times with the perfect apparatus that nobody wants. Is there really a mass market for a machine that can posit moral and ethical judgments, that can set up and enforce categories, that is able to discern, and to make philosophical pronouncements? Have I not racked up one more triumphant folly?”

“Maurice, this thing is a natural-born garbage disposal,” I tell him. He

turn that green color lots of people do when I shed a big light on them.

“A garbage disposal!” he sing out. “The aeons labored to give birth to it through the finest mind - mine — of the millennium, and this brother of a giant ape says it is a garbage disposal! It is a new aspect of thought, the novo instauration, the mind of tomorrow fruited today, and this obscene ogre says it is a Garbage Disposal!! The Constellations do homage to it, and Time has not waited in vain, and you, you splay-footed horse-herder, you call it a GARBAGE DISPOSAL!”

Maurice was so carried away with the thought that he cried a little. It sure is nice when someone agrees with you as long and loud as Maurice did. When he was run out of words he got ahold of the brandy bottle with both hands and drunk it all off. Then he slept the clock around. He was real tired.

He looked kind of sheepful when he finally woke up.

“I feel better now, outside of feeling worse,” he say. “You are right, Spade, it’s a garbage disposal.”

He programmed it to get all the slush out of his blood and liver and kidneys and head. It did it. It cured his hangover in straight-up no time at all. It also shaved him and removed his appendix. Just give it the nod and it would nullify anything.

“We will call it the Hog-Belly Honey,” I say, “on account of it will eat anything, and it work so sweet.”

“That is what we will call it privately.” Maurice nodded. “But in company it will be known as the Pantophag.” That is the same thing in Greek.

It was at the time of this area of good feeling that I split a Voxo with Maurice. Each of you have one-half of a tuned Voxo and you can talk to each other anywhere the world, and the thing is so nonconspicuous that nobody can see it on you.

We got a big booth and showed the Hog-Belly Honey, the Pantophag, at the Trade Fair.

Say, we did put on a good show! The people came in and looked and listened till they were walleyed. That Maurice could give a good spiel, and I’m about the best there is myself. We sure were two fine-looking men, after Maurice told me that maybe I detracted a little bit by being in my undershirt, and I went and put a shirt on. And that bushy-tailed machine just sparkled — like everything does that is made out of Wotto-metal.

Kids threw candy-bar wrappers at it, and they disappeared in the middle of the air. “Frisk me,” they said, and everything in their pockets that was no good for nothing was gone. A man held up a stuffed briefcase, and it was almost empty in a minute. A few people got mad when they lost beards and moustaches, but we explained to them that their boscaje hadn’t done a thing for them; if the ornaments had had even appearance value the machine would have left them be. We pointed out other people who kept their brush; whatever they had behind it, they must have needed the cover.

“Could I have one in my house, and when?” a lady asks.

“Tomorrow, for forty-nine ninety-five installed,” I tell her. “It will get rid of anything no good. It’ll pluck chickens, or bone roasts for you. It will clear out all those old love letters from that desk and leave just the ones from the guy that meant it. It will relieve you of thirty pounds in the strategic places, and frankly, lady, this alone will make it worth your while. It will get rid of old buttons that don’t match, and seeds that won’t sprout. It will destroy everything that is not so good for nothing.”

“It can posit moral and ethical judgments,” Maurice tells the people. “It can set up and enforce categories.”

“Maurice and me is partners,” I tell them all. “We look alike and think alike. We even talk alike.”

“Save I in the hieratic and he in the demotic,” Maurice say. “This is the only nullifier in the world able to make full philosophical pronouncements. It is the unfailing judge of what is of some use and what is not. And it disposes neatly.”

Man, the people did pour in to see it all that morning! They slacked off a little bit just about noon.

“I wonder how many people have come into our booth this morning?” Maurice wondered to me. “I would guess near ten thousand.”

“I don’t have to guess,” I say. “There is nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight who have come in, Maurice,” I tell him, for I am always the automatic calculator. “There is nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven who have left,” I go on, “and there are forty-four here now.”

Maurice smiled. “You have made a mistake,” he says. “It doesn’t add up.”

And that is when the hair riz up on the back of my neck.

I don’t make mistakes when I calculate, and I can see now that the

Hog-Belly Honey don't make none either. Well, it's too late to make one now if you're not trained for it, but it might not be too late to get out the way of the storm before it hits.

"Crank the cuckoo," I whisper to Maurice, "make the bindlestiff, hit the macadam!"

"Je ne comprends pas," says Maurice, which means "Let's hit the road, boys," in French, so I know my partner understands me.

I am out of the display hall at a high run, and Maurice racing along beside me so lightfoot that he don't make no noise. There is a sky-taxi just taking off.

"Jump for it, Maurice!" I sing out I jump for it myself, and hook my fingers over the rear rail and am dangling in the air. I look to see if Maurice make it. Make it! He isn't even there! He didn't come out with me. I look back, and I see him through a window going to his spiel again.

Now that is a mule-headed development. My partner, who is as like me as two heads in one hat, had not understand me.

At the port I hook onto a sky-freight just going to Mexico.

I don't never have to pack no bag. I say that a man who don't always carry two years' living in that crimp green stuff in his back pocket ain't in no condition to meet fait. In thirty minutes I am sit down in a hotel in Cueva Peoquita and have all the pleasantries at hand. Then I snap on my Voxo to hear what Maurice is signaling about.

"Why didn't you tell me that the Pantophag was nullifying people?" he ask kind of shrill.

"I did tell you," I say. "Nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven added to forty-four don't come to nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight. You said so yourself. How are things on the home front, Maurice? That's a joke."

"It's no joke," he say kind of fanatic like. "I have locked myself in a little broom closet, but they're going to break down the door. What can I do?"

"Why, Maurice, just explain to those people that the folks nullified by the machine were no good for nothing because the machine don't make mistakes."

"I doubt that I can convince the parents and spouses and children of the nullified people of this. They're after blood. They're breaking down the door now, Spade. I hear them say they will hang me."



“Tell them you won’t settle for anything less than a new rope, Maurice,” I tell him. That’s an old joke. I switch off the Voxo because Maurice is not making anything except gurgling noises which I cannot interpret.

A thing like that blow over real fast after they have already hang one guy for it and are satisfied. I am back in town and am rolling all those new ideas around in my head, like a bunch of rocks. But I’m not going to build the Hog-Belly Honey again. It is too logical for safety, and is a little before its time.

I am looking to get me another partner. Come into Grogley’s if you are interested. I show up there every hour or so. I want a guy as like me as two necks in one noose — what make me think of a thing like that? — a guy look like me and think like me and talk like me.

Just ask for Joe Spade.

But the one I hook onto for a new partner will have to be a fellow who understands me when the scuppers are down.

## NINE HUNDRED GRANDMOTHERS

Ceran Swicegood was a promising young Special Aspects Man. But, like all Special Aspects, he had one irritating habit. He was forever asking the question: How Did it All Begin?

They all had tough names except Ceran. Manbreaker Crag, Heave Huckle, Blast Berg, George Blood, Move Manion (when Move says “Move,” you move), Trouble Trent. They were supposed to be tough, and they had taken tough names at the naming. Only Ceran kept his own — to the disgust of his commander, Manbreaker

“Nobody can be a hero with a name like Ceran Swicegood!” Manbreaker would thunder. “Why don’t you take Storm Shannon? That’s good. Or Gutboy Barrelhouse or Slash Slagle or Nevel knife? You barely glanced at the suggested list.”

“I’ll keep my own,” Ceran always said, and that is where he made his mistake. A new name will sometimes bring out a new personality. It had done so for George Blood. Though the hair on George’s chest was a graft job, yet that and his new name had turned him from a boy into a man. Had Ceran assumed the heroic name of Gutboy Barreihouse he might have been capable of rousing endeavors and man-sized angers rather than his tittering indecisions and flouncy fires.

They were down on the big asteroid Proavitus — a sphere that almost tinkled with the potential profit that might be shaken out of it. And the tough men of the Expedition knew their business. They signed big contracts on the native velvet-like bark scrolls and on their own parallel tapes. They impress, inveigled and somewhat cowed the slight people of Proavitus. Here was a solid two-way market, enough to make them slaver. And there was a whole world of oddities that could lend themselves to the luxury trade.

“Everybody’s hit it big but you,” Manbreaker crackled in kindly thunder to Ceran after three days there. “But even Special Aspects is supposed to pay its way. Our charter compels us to carry one of your sort to give a cultural twist to the thing, but it needn’t be restricted to that. What we go out for every time, Ceran, is to cut a big fat hog in the rump — we make no secret of that, But if the hog’s tail can be shown to have a cultural twist to it, that will solve a requirement. And if that twist in the tail can turn us a profit, then we become mighty happy about the whole

thing. Have you been able to find out anything about the living dolls, for instance? They might have both a cultural aspect and a market value.”

“The living dolls seem a part of something much deeper,” Ceran said. “There’s a whole complex of things to be unraveled. The key may be the statement of the Proavitoi that they do not die.”

“I think they die pretty young, Ceran. All those out and about are young, and those I have met who do not leave their houses are only middling old.”

Then where are their cemeteries?”

“Likely they cremate the old folks when they die.”

“Where are the crematories?”

“They might just toss the ashes out or vaporize the entire remains. Probably they have no reverence for ancestors.”

“Other evidence shows their entire culture to be based on an exaggerated reverence for ancestors.”

“You find out, Ceran. You’re Special Aspects Man.”

Ceran talked to Nokoma, his Proavitoi counterpart as translator. Both were expert, and they could meet each halfway in talk. Nokoma was likely feminine, There was a certain softness about both the sexes of the Proavitoi, but the men of the Expedition believed that they had them straight now.

“Do you mind if I ask some straight questions?” Ceran greeted her today.

“Sure is not. How else I learn the talk well but by talking?”

“Some of the Proavitoi say that they do not die, Nokoma. Is this true?”

“How is not be true? If they die, they not be here to say they do not die. Oh, I joke, I joke. No, we do not die. It is a foolish alien custom which we see no reason to imitate. On Proavitus, only the low creatures die.”

“None of you does?”

“Why, no. Why should one want to be an exception in this?”

“But what do you do when you get very old?”

“We do less and less then. We come to a deficiency of energy. Is it not the same with you?”

“Of course. But where do you go when you become exceedingly old?”

“Nowhere. We stay at home then. Travel is for the young and those of the active years.”

“Let’s try it from the other end,” Ceran said. “Where are your father and mother, Nokoma?”

“Out and about. They aren’t really old.”

“And your grandfathers and grandmothers?”

“A few of them still get out. The older ones stay home.”

“Let’s try it this way. How many grandmothers do you have, Nokoma?”

“I think I have nine hundred grandmothers in my house. Oh, I know that isn’t many, but we are the young branch of a family. Some of our clan have very great numbers of ancestors in their houses.”

“And all these ancestors are alive?”

“What else? Who would keep things not alive? How would such be ancestors?”

Ceran began to hop around in his excitement.

“Could I see them?” he twittered.

“It might not be wise for you to see the older of them,” Nokoma cautioned, “It could be an unsettling thing for strangers, and we guard it. A few tens of them you can see, of course.”

Then it came to Ceran that he might be onto what he had looked for all his life. He went into a panic of expectation.

“Nokoma, it would be finding the key!” he fluted. “If none of you has ever died, then your entire race would still be alive!”

“Sure. Is like you count fruit. You take none away, you still have them all.”

“But if the first of them are still alive, then they might know their origin! They would know how it began! Do they? Do you?”

“Oh, not I. I am too young for the Ritual.”

“But who knows? Doesn’t someone know?”

“Oh, yes, All the old ones know how it began.”

“How old? How many generations back from you till they know?”

“Ten, no more. When I have ten generations of children, then I will also go to the Ritual.”

“The Ritual. What is it?”

“Once a year, the old people go to the very old people. They wake them up and ask them how it all began. The very old people tell them the beginning. It is a high time. Oh, how they bottle and laugh! Then the very old people go back to sleep for another year. So it is passed down to the

generations. That is the Ritual.”

The Proavitoi were not humanoid. Still less were they “monkey-faces,” though that name was now set in the explorers’ lingo. They were upright and robed, and swathed, and were assumed to be two-legged under their garments. Though, as Manbreaker said, “They might go on wheels, for all we know.”

They had remarkable flowing hands that might be called everywhere-digited. They could handle tools, or employ their hands as if they were the most intricate tools.

George Blood was of the opinion that the Proavitoi were always masked, and that the men of the Expedition had never seen their faces. He said that those apparent faces were ritual masks, and that no part of the Proavitoi had ever been seen by the men except for those remarkable hands, which perhaps were their real faces.

The men reacted with cruel hilarity when Ceran tried to explain to them just what a great discovery he was verging on.

“Little Ceran is still on the how-did-it-begin jag,” Man-breaker Jeered. “Ceran, will you never give off asking which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

“I will have that answer very soon,” Ceran sang. “I have the unique opportunity. When I find how the Proavitoi began, I may have the clue to how everything began. All of the Proavitoi are still alive, the very first generation of them.”

“It passes belief that you can be so simpleminded,” Manbreaker moaned. “They say that one has finally mellowed ‘when he can suffer fools gracefully. By God, I hope I never come to that.”

But two days later, it was Manbreaker who sought out Ceran Swicegood on nearly the same subject. Manbreaker had been doing a little thinking and discovering of his own.

“You are Special Aspects Man, Ceran,” he said, “and you have been running off after the wrong aspect.”

“What is that?”

“It don’t make a damn how it began. What is important is that it may not have to end.”

“It is the beginning that I intend to discover,” said Ceran.

“You fool, can’t you understand anything? What do the Proavitoi possess so uniquely that we don’t know whether they have it by science or

by fool luck?”

“Ah, their chemistry, I suppose.”

“Sure. Organic chemistry has come of age here. The Proavitoi have every kind of nexus and inhibitor and stimulant. They can grow and shrink and telescope and prolong what they will. These creatures seem stupid to me; it is as if they had these things by instinct. But they have them, that is what is important. With these things, we can become the patent medicine kings of the universes, for the Proavitoi do not travel or make many outside contacts. These things can do anything or undo anything. I suspect that the Proavitoi can shrink cells, and I suspect that they can do something else.”

“No, they couldn’t shrink cells. It is you who nonsense now, Manbreaker.”

“Never mind. Their things already make nonsense of conventional chemistry. With the pharmacopoeia that one could pick up here, a man need never die, That’s the stick horse you’ve been riding, isn’t it? But you’ve been riding it backward with your head to the tail. They say that they never die.”

“They seem pretty sure that they don’t. If they did, they would be the first to know it, as Nokoma says.”

“What? Have these creatures humor?”

“Some.”

“But, Ceran, you don’t understand how big this is.”

“I’m the only one who understands it so far. It means that if the Proavitoi have always been immortal, as they maintain, then the oldest of them are still alive. From them I may be able to learn how their species — and perhaps every species — began.”

Manbreaker went into his dying buffalo act then. He tore his hair and nearly pulled out his ears by the roots. He stomped and pawed and went off bull-bellowing: “It don’t make a damn how it began, you fool! It might not have to end!” so loud that the hills echoed back:

“It don’t make a damn — you fool.”

Ceran Swicegood went to the house of Nokoma, but not with her on her invitation. He went without her when he knew that she was away from home. It was a sneaky thing to do, but the men of the Expedition were trained in sneakery.

He would find out better without a mentor about the nine hundred

grandmothers, about the rumored living dolls. He would find out what the old people did do if they didn't die, and find if they knew how they were first born. For his intrusion, he counted on the innate politeness of the Proavitoi.

The house of Nokoma, of all the people, was in the cluster on top of the large flat hill, the Acropolis of Proavitus. They were earthen houses, though finely done, and they had the appearance of growing out of and be a part of the hill itself.

Ceran went up the winding, ascending flagstone paths, and entered the house which Nokoma had once pointed out to him. He entered furtively, and encountered one of the nine hundred grandmothers — one with whom nobody need be furtive.

The grandmother was seated and small and smiling at him. They talked without real difficulty, though it was not as easy as with Nokoma, who could meet Ceran halfway in his own language. At her call, there came a grandfather who likewise smiled at Ceran. These two ancients were somewhat smaller than the Proavitoi of active years. They were kind and serene. There was an atmosphere about the scene that barely missed being an odor-not unpleasant, sleepy, reminiscent of something, almost sad.

“Are there those here older than you?” Ceran asked earnestly.

“So many, so many! Who could know how many?” said the grandmother. She called in other grandmothers, and grandfathers older and smaller than herself, these no more than half the size of the active Proavitoi — small, sleepy, smiling.

Ceran knew now that the Proavitoi were not masked. The older they were, the more character and interest there was in their faces. It was only of the immature active of the Proavitoi that there could have been a doubt. No masks could show such calm and smiling old age as this. The queer textured stuff was their real faces.

So old and friendly, so weak and sleepy, there must have been a dozen generations of them there back to the oldest and smallest.

“How old are the oldest?” Ceran asked the first grandmother.

“We say that all are the same age since all are perpetual,” the grandmother told him. “It is not true that all are the same age, but it is indelicate to ask how old.”

“You do not know what a lobster is,” Ceran said to them, trembling,

“but it is a creature that will boil happily, if the water on him is heated slowly. He takes no alarm, for he does not know at what point the heat is dangerous. It is that gradual here with me. I slide from one degree to another with you and my credulity is not alarmed. I am in danger of believing anything about you if it comes in small doses, and it will. I believe that you are here and as you are for no other reason than that I see and touch you. Well, I’ll be boiled for a lobster, then, before I turn back from it. Are there those here even older than the ones present?”

The first grandmother motioned Ceran to follow her. They went down a ramp through the floor into the older part of the house, which must have been under ground.

Living dolls! They were here in rows on the shelves, and sitting in small chairs in their niches. Doll-sized indeed, and several hundred of them.

Many had wakened at the intrusion. Others came awake when spoken to or touched. They were incredibly ancient, but they were cognizant in their glances and recognition. They smiled and stretched sleepily, not as humans would, but as very old puppies might. Ceran spoke to them, and they understood each other surprisingly.

Lobster, lobster, said Ceran to himself, the water has passed the danger point! And it hardly feels different. If you believe your senses in this, then you will be boiled alive in your credulity.

He knew now that the living dolls were real and that they were the living ancestors of the Proavitoi.

Many of the little creatures began to fall asleep again. Their waking moments were short, but their sleeps seemed to be likewise. Several of the living mummies woke a second time while Ceran was still in the room, woke refreshed from very short sleeps and were anxious to talk again.

“You are incredible!” Ceran cried out, and all the small and smaller and still smaller creatures smiled and laughed their assent. Of course they were, All good creatures everywhere are incredible, and were there ever so many assembled in one place? But Ceran was greedy. A roomful of miracles wasn’t enough.

“I have to take this back as far as it will go!” he cried avidly. “Where are the even older ones?”

“There are older ones and yet older and again older,” said the first



grandmother, “and thrice-over older ones, but perhaps it would be wise not to seek to be too wise. You have seen enough. The old people are sleepy. Let us go up again.”

Go up again, out of this? Ceran would not, He saw passages and descending ramps, down into the heart of the great hill itself. There were whole worlds of rooms about him and under his feet. Ceran went on and down, and who was to stop him? Not dolls and creatures much smaller than dolls.

Manbreaker had once called himself an old pirate who reveled in the stream of his riches. But Ceran was the Young Alchemist who was about to find the Stone itself.

He walked down the ramps through centuries and millennia. The atmosphere he had noticed on the upper levels was a clear odor now — sleepy, half-remembered, smiling, sad and quite strong. That is the way Time smells.

“Are there those here even older than you?” Ceran asked a small grandmother whom he held in the palm of his hand.

“So old and so small that I could hold in my hand,” said the grandmother in what Ceran knew from Nokoma to be the older uncompounded form of the Proavitus language.

Smaller and older the creatures had been getting as Ceran went through the rooms. He was boiled lobster now for sure. He had to believe it all: he saw and felt it. The wren-sized grandmother talked and laughed and nodded that there were those far older than herself, and in doing so she nodded herself back to sleep. Ceran returned her to her niche in the hive-like wall where there were thousands of others, miniaturized generations.

Of course he was not in the house of Nokoma now. He was in the heart of the hill that underlay all the houses of Proavitus, and these were the ancestors of everybody on the asteroid.

“Are there those here even older than you?” Ceran asked a small grandmother whom he held on the tip of his finger.

“Older and smaller,” she said, “but you come near the end.”

She was asleep, and he put her back in her place. The older they were, the more they slept.

He was down to solid rock under the roots of the hill. He was into the passages that were cut out of that solid rock, but they could not be many

or deep. He had a sudden fear that the creatures would become so small that he could not see them or talk to them, and so he would miss the secret of the beginning.

But had not Nokoma said that all the old people knew the secret? Of course. But he wanted to hear it from the oldest of them. He would have it now, one way or the other.

“Who is the oldest? Is this the end of it? Is this the beginning? Wake Up! Wake up!” he called when he was sure he was in the lowest and oldest room.

“Is it Ritual?” asked some who woke up. Smaller than mice they were, no bigger than bees, maybe older than both.

“It is a special Ritual,” Ceran told them. “Relate to me how it was in the beginning.”

What was that sound — too slight, too scattered to be a noise? It was like a billion microbes laughing. It was the hilarity of little things waking up to a high time.

“Who is the oldest of all?” Ceran demanded, for their laughter bothered him. “Who is the oldest and first?”

“I am the oldest, the ultimate grandmother,” one said gaily. “All the others are my children. Are you also of my children?”

“Of course,” said Ceran, and the small laughter of unbelief flittered out from the whole multitude of them.

“Then you must be the ultimate child, for you are like no other. If you be, then it is as funny at the end as it was in the beginning.”

“How was it in the beginning?” Ceran bleated. “You are the first. Do you know how you came to be?”

“Oh, yes, yes,” laughed the ultimate grandmother, and the hilarity of the small things became a real noise now.

“How did it begin?” demanded Ceran, and he was hopping and skipping about in his excitement.

“Oh, it was so funny a joke the way things began that you would not believe it,” chattered the grandmother. “A joke, a joke!”

“Tell me the joke, then. If a joke generated your species, then tell me that cosmic joke.”

“Tell yourself,” tinkled the grandmother. “You are a part of the joke if you are of my children. Oh, it is too funny to believe. How good to wake up and laugh and go to sleep again.”

Blazing green frustration! To be so close and to be balked by a giggling bee!

“Don’t go to sleep again! Tell me at once how it began!” Ceran shrilled, and he had the ultimate grandmother between thumb and finger.

“This is not Ritual,” the grandmother protested. “Ritual is that you guess what it was for three days, and we laugh and say ‘No, no, no, it was something nine times as wild as that. Guess some more.’”

“I will not guess for three days! Tell me at once or I will crush you,” Ceran threatened in a quivering voice.

“I look at you, you look at me, I wonder if you will do it.” the ultimate grandmother said calmly.

Any of the tough men of the Expedition would have done it — would have crushed her, and then another and another and another of the creatures till the secret was told. If Ceran had taken on a tough personality and a tough name he’d have done it. If he’d been Gutboy Barrelhouse he’d have done it without a qualm. But Ceran Swicegood couldn’t do it.

“Tell me,” he pleaded in agony. “All my life I’ve tried to find out how it began, how anything began. And you know!”

“We know. Oh, it was so funny how it began. So joke! So fool, so clown, so grotesque thing! Nobody could guess, nobody could believe.”

“Tell me! Tell me!” Ceran was ashen and hysterical. “No, no, you are no child of mine,” chortled the ultimate grandmother. “Is too joke a joke to tell a stranger. We could not insult a stranger to tell so funny, so unbelievable. Strangers can die. Shall I have it on conscience that a stranger died laughing?”

“Tell me! Insult me! Let me die laughing!” But Ceran nearly died crying from the frustration that ate him up as a million bee-sized things laughed and hooted and giggled:

“Oh, it was so funny the way it began!”

And they laughed. And laughed. And went on laughing... until Ceran Swicegood wept and laughed together, and crept away, and returned to the ship still laughing. On his next voyage he changed his name to Blaze Boat and ruled for ninety-seven days as king of sweet sea island in M-81, but that is another and much more unpleasant story.

## GOLDEN TRABANT

The man who entered, though quiet and soft-stepping, was none of your tame animals. He'd kill for the one thing he wanted and couldn't get enough of; but he hardly knew what to do with the packet of it he had under his arm. The man had a slight green tinge to him, and Patrick T. K. guessed that what he carried would have it also.

In an earlier era the man would have been tagged immediately as a seaman. Plainly he was still that, but of a more ethereal sea. Under his arm he had a package wrapped in newspaper, and more sturdily wrapped beneath. It was not a large package, but it was quite heavy.

The faring man was slim but amazingly wiry. Patrick T. K. was fat but with a lean and hungry eye that couldn't be fooled. Patrick set the weight of the package carried by the man at a hundred and twenty pounds.

If it were iron of such bulk it would weigh hardly a third that. If it were lead it would not be that heavy. Patrick studied the tendons on the side of the man's neck and the bulging veins on the back of his hand. He studied the set of his feet as he stood there, and he calculated the man's center of gravity, package included. Mercury would not be that heavy. Platinum would be heavier by a tenth. Patrick T. K. sometimes made mistakes in his judgment, but he never made mistakes by as much as ten percent.

So the seaman had a lump of gold to sell him. Nothing unusual about that. Patrick T. K. bought more sly gold than anyone in town.

"I've been told," said the seaman, "and it doesn't matter by whom, that you might be able to give me good cash for what I have here. But I won't be beaten down. I know my price."

And I know mine," said Paddy T. K. "Twenty thousand. How do you want it? Well, come, come, how? Twenties, fifties, hundreds, thousands or a king's mixture?"

"I had priced it a little higher," said the man. "What? For that undersized loaf of bread under your arm? Two hundred dollars a pound for a hundred pounds is as close as I can figure."

"It weighs more."

"I know what it weighs. But I like to use round figures." "Shall I unwrap it here? Have you a place to test it?" "Leave it wrapped. Here is the sum And if you find it short a bill or two, be assured it is a dishonest

mistake.”

“There is more where this comes from.”

“I can take this much every two weeks. Now be off.” “You’re not going to look at it? How can you be sure what it is?”

“I have X-ray eyes.”

“Oh.”

But when Paddy T. K. was alone he put other things away and locked the door. He took the package to a back room, puffing heavily, for it was just as heavy as he knew it must be. He unwrapped it.

There was little that Patrick did not know about gold. He knew the greenishness of African gold, whether of the Gold Coast or the South; the greasiness of Kolyma gold and also its extreme unavailability; the cupric tinge of Sierra Madre gold whether from the Guatemala or Mexico district. He was familiar with the sudden brightness of Milne Bay gold, with the granularity of the Canadian, the musclelike texture of that of Witwatersrand, the lightness of color of the gold of California and nearby Sonora, and the white gold (almost electrum) of New Guinea above Milne Bay.

This was none of them. It was raw but fine, and very, very slightly cupric. The green tint in it was about the same as that in the complexion of the man. Patrick set down the weight in a notebook. And at the column for the origin he did not hesitate. He wrote down “Extraterrestrial.”

That was the first written note of the thing.

Later, this gold would be known as St. Simeon gold (from a station on its route, not from its origin), but Patrick T. K., the old jewelry factor and sly gold dealer, was not fooled.

Within a month, the Wall Street Journal had also referred to the new gold as extraterrestrial. The boys on that sheet also knew about gold, wherever they got their knowledge. But the Journal was derided for its correct guess. Gold cargo had never been authorized. No such gold had been mined except for pilot digs in conjunction with other operations. The cost would have been prohibitive, considering the cargo of necessary production machinery and the rudimentary state of exploration and the rarity of any solid finds. Off-Earth gold was still a generation away.

It was a four-man corporation made up of: Robert Fountain, an unobstructed genius; George Grinder, a ruthless ruffian; Carlos Trevino, the last of the Conquistadores and perhaps the first of a new kind of man;

and Arpad Szild, a murderous Irishman who used a dead man's papers and a dead man's name.

Three of them had been dining in quiet luxury one evening at Trevino's when Szild appeared in the midst of them, "the doors and windows being closed," as Fountain related it with his biting humor, but that part of it may not be true.

"I've been there. I can take you to it," Szild said suddenly. He sat down and began to eat with his hands from the bowls.

"I grind up better stuff than you for feed supplement for my cattle," Trevino said. "Who are you? What can you take us to?"

"To the Trabant. You were talking about the legend."

All right. You talk about the legend, real fast," Robert Fountain said. "You haven't much time." He laid a hog-nosed gun in front of him on the table.

"It's shaped like a balk or a beam," Szild said. "Its greater diameter is twenty-five hundred meters, and its lesser is fifteen hundred — a little less than two cubic miles. It's a misshapen tapered beam or egg with a cleft at its minor end. Its rotation is a tumble, and the period of the tumble is just short of thirty minutes. It's as bad-natured a rock as can be found. Cuts you to pieces. Shouldn't have an atmosphere, but there's something that tears up your lungs no matter how you're suited. It's an angry place, I tell you. But it's gold."

That was the Golden Trabant, one of the smaller of the eighteen hundred significant asteroids orbiting between Mars and Jupiter. When finally charted several years after this, it would be given the noxious name Venenatus — but that was after it had been treated and its nature changed.

"We have a nice sketchy catalog of every asteroid down to about that size," said Grinder. "Nobody knows much about their details, but they are numbered and given their relative positions and speeds in the asteroid stream. Can you tell us which it is?"

"Can. Won't," said Szild. "But I'll take you there."

Szild had known that he would have to play his ace on the first round. After he had taken them to it, they would have no reason to keep him alive: but he had gambled his life before.

He said he had been there and knew where it was. The odds were high enough for them to take a chance on believing him. They acquired a ship

and mounted a flight.

The ship was old and had been deactivated. Carlos Trevino bought it at surplus and had it towed down by tug and beached at a remote spot on the holdings of the Trevino family. It was activated by the genius of Fountain and the driving energy of Grinder. They took twelve young Hispanic technicians, none of whom are alive to give their versions. They hadn't known what they would run into nor what the labor would be at breaking up and loading the cargo. They went up, and they loaded the cargo.

They came back, the four of them without the twelve young technicians. Their first cargo. A trip of only five weeks. The Trabant was not distant.

Szild showed an exceptional talent at remaining alive. It is hard to kill a man as tough and canny as he, one who is never off guard. He spent the two weeks of the return barricaded in a little compartment, and the three leaders had to postpone Szild's killing till their earthing. Szild knew that they had mostly delegated such jobs as that. He himself had had to kill the twelve young technicians for them.

He bulled his way out when they were busy with earthfall and secure landing.

"He can't get away," Trevino said.

He couldn't get clear of the surrounding jungle; he did. Trevino who knew his own land minutely could track Szild down; he couldn't. He couldn't take much with him; he took a hundred and twenty pounds of it. That wasn't much out of a cargo like theirs, and whatever story Szild might tell would not be believed. He had no reason to tell any story at all; he didn't.

But somehow he reached port and took passage to the North, for Szild was the man who sold that first lump of gold to Patrick T. K.

Another man would have been satisfied with that and steered clear of them. Not Szild. Nevertheless, they were surprised when he returned to them just at second take off time, as they were going now with a ship that was really a ship. He came on foot across the savanna from the inland side.

"'Something like this happens every time I leave the house for a minute,' as the woman said as she examined the mandible and two parietal bones of her newly eaten child," Szild greeted them. "Would you

be going without me? The news I had of you was sketchy and I am barely here in time.”

“Kill him!” said Robert Fountain.

“Kill him, Fountain says, and the other two look at each other. Was it not better, Fountain, to have a man who will kill when you say kill, and avoid these awkward pauses? But I kill hard, Fountain. I go as long as anybody goes, and afterwards.”

Szild went with them. They would kill him after the hard work of loading was done. They would kill him after he had done his turn at the instruments out and back. By and by they would kill him.

They brought back two hundred tons on that second voyage. They made a third voyage and a fourth and a fifth.

The establishment of the Commonwealth of San Simeon did not shake the world. Not at first. Nobody had ever heard of the place. It seemed a prank. Possibly a name given to a rebel hold.

Yet the Commonwealth was recognized that first day by its two adjacent Central American neighbors. They constituted themselves coprotectors of the new country. One of them, indeed, had ceded the land for it, the ancient and run-down rancho of the Trevino family. Some consideration had surely been paid for this protection.

It was soon after this that the heavy San Simeon Duros (fifty dollar gold pieces) began to appear around the world.

The appearance of these Duros caused a nervousness all out of proportion to the number of them. It is possible that not more than twenty million of them (that is, a billion dollars' worth) went into circulation that first year. That is a large amount coming from a new small country, but it shouldn't be enough to unhinge the world. Yet it did almost that.

Gold had gotten out of the habit of showing itself in society. For years it had sat at home in vaults, and a multiplier had been used to equate it with credit money. Nobody knew what to make of naked gold returning to the market. And what if this stream should be but the beginning of a veritable river?

And the stream was spreading. Three Central American countries were on a gold spree. It was slopping over into others.

The mystery of San Simeon was not solved. The exact location of the country was unknown to the world at large. Its form of government was



not to be ascertained. Its statistics softened and disappeared when examined. It had a president, Fuentes. It had a prime minister, Moliner — the miller, the grinder. It had a foreign minister, Trevino. It had the hardest currency in the world. Its national game was playing hob with the currencies of the rest of the world.

If one small shrew is put into a warren of mice or rats, it causes panic. The shrew is smaller than any of them and it may be one against hundreds. But it will eat them; it will eat them alive. And given time, it will eat them all.

Something like this happened to the green money, the white money, the rainbow-colored money of the world. Token shrivels before the thing itself. It could not stand up to free and growing gold.

But if the warren is big enough, the shrew can be contained. There will be some of the rats knowing and political enough to go out and hire shrews of their own. The source of the gold stream could not be hidden forever.

One thing (Szild always said it was a mistake and Robert Fountain agreed that it was, but they couldn't hold the other two in line) was that the first ships begat others. Trevino and Grinder Molinero became too hasty in their greed. In that second year they had twelve ships in the service instead of one. That meant that somewhere between fifty and a hundred men knew the source.

The shores began to cave. The golden stream was a river. It crested to a torrent. One ship defected, then another. They came back to Earth in other lands than those of their departure. And wherever they came down they spawned other ships.

A dozen other countries were in the race by the third year. Now there was privateering and open piracy. The ships became battle boats, death spheres, and the attrition was terrifying. But the inward flood of the metal continued.

The world importation by the fourth year had risen to five hundred billion dollars annually, if it could any longer be equated in dollars. The gold dollar itself was not as hard as it had been.

The Trabant had changed. The period of its tumble was now only twenty-three minutes. The egg had been cracked and gutted in many places, and the cleft at the minor end had become a chasm between two horns. There was a project to shear off one of the horns and tow it to

Earth in hunks of a million cubic yards each. This would be a lot of gold.

It was time for oblique measures, and they were found. The effect of the gold on the world had not really been bad. The effect on most people had been marvelous. But there was a small group that had always borne the burden of currency decisions. They were made nervous by this unbridled activity. Their hold was slipping. They took measures.

A small commission of not overly intelligent men found an answer. In their own field they understood cause and effect. They acted on doubtful authority, and they were not of one mind about the action. But they did it.

They killed Trabant.

One treatment was enough for the little rock. It couldn't be cleansed; it couldn't be unpoisoned after that. It would be deadly for a thousand years. Then they gave it its first official name, Venenatus, the poison asteroid. A near approach would radiate the flesh off a man's bones.

Things came back to normal in about three years. The shrews had killed each other, and the wise rats once more ran the warren. The new fortunes tottered and fell back into the bags of the old.

Somewhere, we never did know its exact location, San Simeon (no longer able to pay the high price for protection) lost its independence and became again a run-down rancho.

Gold stuck to some fingers longer than to others. Fuentes and Grinder will never run out of it. Trevino was choked to death by the political strings on his. He died along with his small country, and he hadn't intended to.

Szild didn't know what he did with all his money. He paid little attention to it, and he suspected that he hadn't received nearly as much of it as had his nervous partners.

He spent it manfully. He threw it away. It gave him a dour pleasure to go from billionaire to bum. Then Arpad Szild was down to his last San Simeon Duro.

He laughed. Something had been missing from his life. Now it might be back. His gold was gone. So what to do?

He went up for some more.

Up to Venenatus the poison asteroid that would radiate a man's flesh off?

Sure. Szild didn't believe a lot of that stuff.

Patrick T. K. was alone in his shop when there entered a hooded man with a small heavy package.

“I was beginning to think I would see you no more,” said Patrick. “I was told that that traffic had ended. I should have known better. I believe you are the same man, my first supplier of it, though I cannot see your face.”

“I have none,” said the hooded man. “How much for this?”

“Oh, ten dollars.”

“A pound?”

“No. The lot. I figure about eight cents a pound. That’s as high as I can go on contaminated gold. Oh sure, I can clean it. It’s only the smart men who say it can’t be done. It will even leave a handy profit for myself, though not for you. Gold’s about done for.”

“That isn’t much. I have more of the stuff, a fair small load.”

“I can take about this much a week. Can you live on ten dollars a week?”

“Yes. I don’t eat any longer — no stomach. I don’t sleep. I just keep moving. I can live on that.”

“And when your fair small load is gone?”

“I go up for another.”

“They say nobody goes there and returns.”

“I do. But it isn’t crowded there now.”

“I’ve a feeling that comes to me rarely. I’d like to help you. Are you blind?”

“I believe so. I have pooled what is left of each of my senses, and somehow it serves. I need no help. I’m the only happy man in the world, the one who found the pot of gold. They can’t take that from me. I’ll go get it forever.”

“After you’re dead?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve known space ghosts. Now I’ll be one. It isn’t any one line you cross. I live in delirium, of course. It doesn’t blunt pain, but it does change the viewpoint. On my last trip down, after I knew that I was already dead, that both I and the gold were ghosts, it was easier. Oh, those are long nights in purgatory I tell you, but I’m not irrevocably damned. There’s still the gold, you see.”

“You’re a happier man than I am. So pass it over.”

“Here it is.”

But when Szild passed the heavy small package to Patrick, he did it with a hand that was stark splintered hones with only a little black flesh around the heel of it.

Patrick T. K. raised an eyebrow at this, but he didn't raise it very high. A sly gold dealer meets all types.

## AMONG THE HAIRY EARTHMEN

There is one period of our World History that has aspects so afferent from anything that went before and after that we can only gaze back on those several hundred years and ask:

“Was that ourselves who behaved so?”

Well, no, as a matter of fact, it wasn't. It was beings of another sort who visited us briefly and who acted so gloriously and abominably.

This is the way it was:

The Children had a Long Afternoon free. They could go to any of a dozen wonderful places, but they were already in one.

Seven of them — full to the craw of wonderful places — decided to go to Eretz.

“Children are attracted to the oddest and most shambling things,” said the Mothers. “Why should they want to go to Eretz?”

“Let them go,” said the Fathers. “Let them see — before they be gone — one of the few simple peoples left. We ourselves have become a contrived and compromised people. Let the Children be children for half a day.”

Eretz was the Planet of the Offense, and therefore it was to be (perhaps it recently had been) the Planet of the Restitution also. But in no other way was it distinguished. The Children had received the tradition of Eretz as children receive all traditions — like lightning.

Hobble, Michael Goodgrind, Ralpa, Lonnie, Laurie, Bea and Joan they called themselves as they came down on Eretz — for these were their idea of Eretzi names. But they could have as many names as they wished in their games.

An anomalous intrusion of great heat and force! The rocks ran like water where they came down, and there was formed a scarp-pebble enclave.

It was all shanty country and shanty towns on Eretz — clumsy hills, badly done plains and piedmonts, ragged fields, uncleansed rivers, whole weedpatches of provinces — not at all like Home. And the Towns! Firenze, Praha, Venezia, Londra, Colonia, Gant, Roma — why, they were nothing but towns made out of stone and wood! And these were the greatest of the towns of Eretz, not the meanest.

The Children exploded into action. Like children of the less

transcendent races running wild on an ocean beach for an afternoon, they ran wild over continents. They scattered. And they took whatever forms first came into their minds.

Hobble — dark and smoldering like crippled Vulcan.

Michael Goodgrind — a broken-nosed bull of a man. How they all howled when he invented that first form!

Ralpa — like young Mercury.

And Lonnie — a tall giant with a golden beard.

Laurie was fire, Bea was light, Joan was moon-darkness.

But in these, or in any other forms they took, you'd always know that they were cousins or brethren.

Lonnie went pure Gothic. He had come onto it at the tail end of the thing and he fell in love with it.

"I am the Emperor!" he told the people like giant thunder. He pushed the Emperor Wenceslas off the throne and became Emperor.

"I am the true son of Charles, and you had thought me dead," he told the people. "I am Sigismund." Sigismund was really dead, but Lonnie became Sigismund and reigned, taking the wife and all the castles of Wenceslas. He grabbed off gangling old forts and mountain-rocks and raised howling Eretzi armies to make war. He made new castles. He loved the tall sweeping things and raised them to a new height. Have you never wondered that the last of those castles — in the late afternoon of the Gothic — were the tallest and oddest?

One day the deposed Wenceslas came back, and he was possessed of a new power.

"Now we will see who is the real Emperor!" the new Wenceslas cried like a rising storm.

They crashed their two forces and broke clown each other's bridges and towns and stole the high ladies from each other's strongholds. They wrestled like boys. But they wrestled with a continent.

Lonnie (who was Sigismund) learned that the Wenceslas he battled was Michael Goodgrind wearing a contrived Emperor body. So they fought harder.

There came a new man out of an old royal line.

"I am Jobst," the new man cried. "I will show you two princelings who is the real Emperor!"

He fought the two of them with overwhelming verve. He He raised

fast-striking Eretzi armies, and used tricks that only a young Mercury would know. He was Ralpa, entering the game as the third Emperor. But the two combined against him and broke him at Constance.

They smashed Germany and France and Italy like a clutch of eggs. Never had there been such spirited conflict. The Eretzi were amazed by it all, but they were swept into it; it was the Eretzi who made up the armies.

Even today the Eretzi or Earthers haven't the details of it right in their histories. When the King of Aragon, for an example, mixed into it, they treated him as a separate person. They did not know that Michael Goodgrind was often the King of Aragon, just as Lonnie was often the Duke of Flanders. But, played for itself, the Emperor game would be quite a limited one. Too limited for the children.

The girls played their own roles. Laurie claimed to be thirteen different queens. She was consort of all three Emperors in every one of their guises, and she also dabbled with the Eretzi, She was the wanton of the group.

Bea liked the Grande Dame part and the Lady Bountiful bit. She was very good on Great Renunciations. In her different characters, she beat paths from thrones to nunneries and back again; and she is now known as five different saints. Every time you turn to the Common of the Mass of Holy Women who are Neither Virgins nor Martyrs, you are likely to meet her.

And Joan was the dreamer who may have enjoyed the Afternoon more than any of them.

Laurie made up a meodrama — Lucrezia Borgia and tne Poison Ring. There is an advantage in doing these little melodramas on Eretz. You can have as many characters as you wish — they come free. You can have them act as extravagantly as you desire — who is there to object to it? Lucrezia was very well done, as children's burlesques go, and the bodies were strewn from Napoli to Vienne. The Eretzi play with great eagerness any convincing part offered them, and they go to their deaths quite willingly if the part calls for it.

Lonnie made one up called The Pawn-Broker and th Pope. It was in the grand manner, all about the Medici family, and had some very funny episodes in the fourth as Lonnie, who was vain of his acting ability, played Medici parts in five succeeding generations. The drama left more corpses than did the Lucrezia piece, but the killings weren't sudden or

showy; the girls had a better touch at the bloody stuff.

Ralpa did a Think Piece called One, Two, Three — Infinity. In its presentation he put all the rest of the Children to roast grandly in Hell; he filled up Purgatory with Eretzi-type people — the dullards; and for the Paradise he did burlesque of Home. The Eretzi use a cropped version Ralpa's piece and call it the Divine Comedy, leaving out a lot of fun.

Bea did a poetic one named the Witches' Bonfire. All Children spent many a happy evening with that one, and they burnt twenty thousand witches. There was something satisfying about those Eretzi autumnal twilights with the scarlet and the frosty fields and the kine lowing in the meadows the evening smell of witches burning. Bea's was really a pastoral piece.

All the Children ranged far except Hobble. Hobble (who was Vulcan) played with his sick toys. He play at Ateliers and Smithies, at Furnaces and Carousels. And often the Children came and watched his work, and joined in while.

They played with the glass from the furnaces. They goldtoned goblets, iridescent glass poems, figures spheres, goblin pitchers, glass music boxes, gargoyle heads, dragon chargers, princess salieras, figurines of lovers, So many things to make of glass! To make, and to smash when made!

But some of the things they exchanged as gifts instead of smashing them — glass birds and horses, fortune-telling globes that swowed changing people and scenes within, tuned chiming balls that rang like bells, glass cats that sparkled when stroked, wolves and bears, witches that flew.

The Eretzi found some of these things that the Children discaired. They studied them and imitated them.

And again, in the interludes of their other games, the Children came back to Hobble's shops where he sometimes worked with looms. They made costumes of wool and linen and silk. They made trains and cloaks and mantles, all the things for their grand masquerades. They fabricated tapestries and rugs and wove in all sorts of scenes: vistas of Home and of Eretz, people and peacocks, fish and cranes, dingles and dromedaries, larks and lovers. They set their creations in the strange ragged scenery of Eretz and in the rich contrived gardens of Home. A spark went from the Children to their weaving so that none could tell where they left off and



their creations began.

Then they left poor Hobble and went on to their more vital games.

There were seven of them (six, not counting the backward Hobble), but they seemed a thousand. They built themselves castles in Spain and Gardes in Languedoc. The girls played always at Intrigue, for the high pleasure of it, and to give a causus for the wars. And the wars were the things that the boys seldom tired of. It is fun to play at armies with live warriors; and the Eretzi were live... in a sense.

The Eretzi had had wars and armies and sieges long before this, but they had been aimless things. Oh, this was one field where the Eretzi needed the Children. Consider the battles that the Children engineered that afternoon:

Gallipoli — how they managed the ships in that one! The Fathers could not have maneuvered more intricately in their four-dimension chess at Home.

Adrianople, Kunovitz, Dibra, Varna, Hexamilion! It's fun just to call out the bloody names of battles.

Constantinople! That was the one where they first used the big cannon. But who cast the big cannon for the Turks there? In their histories the Eretzi say that it was a man named Orban or Urban, and that he wis Dacian, or he was Hungarian, or he was Danish. How many places did you tell them thalt you came from, Michael Goodgrind?

Belgrade, Trebizond, Morat, Blackheath, Napoli, Donach!

Capua and Taranto — Ralpa's armies beat Michael's at both of those.

Carignola — Lonnie foxed both Michael and Ralpa there, and nearly foxed himself. (You didn't intend it all that way, Lonnie. It was seven-cornered luck and you know it!)

Garigliano where the sea was red with blood and the ships were like broken twigs on the water!

Brescia! Ravenna! Who would have believed that such things could be done with a device known as Spanish infantry?

Villalar, Milan, Pavia! Best of all, the sack of Rome! There were a dozen different games blended into that one. The Eretzi discovered new emotions in themselves there — a deeper depravity and a higher heroism.

Siege of Florence! That one called out the Children's trick. A wonderfully well played game!

Turin, San Quentin, Moncontour, Mookerhide!

Lepanto! The great sea-siege where the castled ships broke asunder and the tall Turk Ochiali Pasha perished with all his fleet and was drowned forever. But it wasn't so forever as you might suppose, for he was Michael Goodgrind who had more bodies than one. The fish still remember Lepanto. Never there been such feasting.

Alcazar-Quivar! That was the last of the excellent ones — the end of the litany. The Children left off the game. They remembered (but conveniently, and after they had worn out the fun of it) that they were forbidden to play Warfare with live soldiers. The Eretzi, left to themselves again, once more conducted their battles as dull and uninspired affairs.

You can put it to a test, now, tonight. Study the conflicts the earlier times, of this high period, and of the time that followed. You will see the difference. For a short two or three centuries you will find really well contrived battles. At before and after there is only ineptitude.

Often the Children played at Jealousies and raised up all the black passions in themselves. They played at Immoralities, for there is an abiding evil in all children.

Maskings and water-carnivals and balls, and forever the emotional intrigue!

Ralpa walked down a valley, playing a lute and wearing the body of someone else. He lured the birds out of the trees and worked a charm on the whole countryside.

An old crone followed him and called, "Love me when I'm old."

"Sempremai, tuttava," sang Ralpa in Eretzi or Earthian. "For Ever, For Always."

A small girl followed and called, "Love me when I'm young."

"Forever, for always," sang Ralpa.

The weirdest witch in the world followed him and called, "Love me when I'm ugly."

"For always, forever," sang Ralpa, and pulled her down on the grass. He knew that all the creatures had been Laurie playing Bodies.

But a peculiar thing happened: the prelude became more important than the play. Ralpa fell in love with his own song, and forgot Laurie who had inspired it. He made all manner of music and poem — aubade, madrigal, chanson; and he topped it off with one hundred sonnets. He made them in Eretzi words, Italy words, Languedoc words, and they were

excellent. And the Eretzi still copy them.

Ralpa discovered there that poetry and song are Passion Deferred. But Laurie would rather have deferred the song. She was long gone away and taking up with others before Ralpa had finished singing his love for her, but he never noticed that she had left him. After Hobble, Ralpa was the most peculiar of them all.

In the meanwhile, Michael Goodgrind invented another game of Bodies. He made them of marble — an Eretzi limestone that cuts easily without faulting. And he painted them on canvas. He made the People of Home, and the Eretzi. He said that he would make angels.

“But you cannot make angels,” said Joan.

“We know that,” said Michael, “but do the Eretzi know at I cannot? I will make angels for the Eretzi.”

He made them grotesque, like chicken men, like bird men, with an impossible duplication of humeral function. And the Children laughed at the carven jokes. But Michael had sudden inspiration. He touched his creations up and added an element of nobility. So an icon was born.

All the Children did it then, and they carried it into other mediums. They made the Eretzi, and they made themselves. You can still see their deep features on some of those statues, that family look that was on them no matter what faces they wore or copied.

Bronze is fun! Bronze horses are the best. Big bronze doors can be an orgy of delight, or bronze bells whose shape is their tone.

The Children went to larger things. They played at Realms and Constitutions, and Banks and Ships and Provinces. Then they came down to smaller things again and played at Books, for Hobble had just invented the printing thing.

Of them all, Hobble had the least imagination. He didn't range wide like the others. He didn't outrage the Eretzi. He spent all his time with his sick toys as though he were a child of much younger years.

The only new body he acquired was another one just like his own. Even this he didn't acquire as did the other Children theirs. He made it laboriously in his shop, and Hobble and the Hobble Creature worked together and you could not tell them apart. One was as dull and laboring as the other.

The Eretzi had no effect whatsoever on the Children, but the Children had great effect on the Eretzi. The Children had the faculty of making

whatever little things they needed or wanted, and the Eretzi began to copy them. In this manner the Eretzi came onto many tools, processes, devices and arts that they had never known before. Out of ten there were these:

The Astrolabe, Equatorium, Quadrant, Lathes and Traversing Tools, Ball-Bearings, Gudgeons, Gig-Mills, Barometers, Range-Finders, Cantilever Construction, Machine-Saws, Screw-Jacks, Hammer-Forges and Drop-Forges, Printing, Steel that was more than puddled Iron, Logarithms, Hydraulic Rams, Screw-Dies, Spanner-Wrenches, Flux-Solder, Telescopes, Microscopes, Mortising Machines, Wire-Drawing, Stanches (Navigation-Locks), Gear Trains, Paper Making, Compass and Wind-Rhumb, Portulan Chairs and Projection Maps, Pinnule-Sights, Spirit-Levels, Fine Micrometers, Porcelain, Fire-Lock Guns, Music Notation and Music Printing, Complex Pulleys and Snatch-Blocks, the Seed-Drill, Playing Cards (the Children's masquerade faces may still be seen on them), Tobacco, the Violin, Whisky, the Mechanical Clock.

They were forbidden, of course, to display any second-aspect powers or machines, as these would disrupt things. But they disrupted accidentally in building, in tooling, in armies and navies, in harbors and canals, in towns and bridges, in ways of thinking and recording. They started a thing that couldn't be reversed. It was only the One Afternoon they were here, only two or three Eretzi Centuries, but they set a trend. They overwhelmed by the very number of their new devices, and it could never be simple on Eretz again.

There were many thousands of Eretz days and nights in that Long Afternoon. The Children had begun to tire of it, and the hour was growing late. For the last time they wandered off, this time all Seven of them together.

In the bodies of Kings and their Ladies, they strode down a High Road in the Levant. They were wondering what last thing they could contrive, when they found their way blocked by a Pilgrim with a staff.

"Let's tumble the hairy Eretzi," shouted Ralpa. "Let him not stand in the way of Kings!" For Ralpa was King of Bulgaria that day.

But they did not tumble the Pilgrim. That man knew how to handle his staff, and he laid the bunch of them low. It was nothing to him that they were the high people of the World who ordered Nations. He flogged them flat.

“Bleak Children!” that Pilgrim cried out as he beat them into the ground. “Unfledged little oafs! Is it so that you waste your Afternoon on Earth? I’ll give you what your Fathers forgot.”

Seven-colored thunder, how he could use that staff! He smashed the gaudy bodies of the Children and broke army of their damnable bones. Did he know that it didn’t matter? Did he understand that the bodies they wore were only for an antic?

“Lay off, old Father!” begged Michael Goodgrind, bleeding and half beaten into the earth. “Stay your bloody bludgeon. You do not know who we are.”

“I know you,” maintained the Pilgrim mountainously.

“You are ignorant Childreen who have abused the Afternoon given you on Earth. You have marred and ruined and warped everything you have touched.”

“No, no,” Ralpa protested — as he set in new bones for his old damaged ones — “You do not understand. We have advanced you a thousand of your years in one of our afternoons. Consider the Centuries we have saved you! It’s as though we had increased your life by that thousand years.”

“We have all the time there is,” said the Pilgrim solidly. “We were well and seriously along our road, and it was not so crooked is the one you have brought us over. You have broken our sequence with your meddling. You’ve set us back more ways than you’ve advanced us. You’ve shattered our Unity.”

“Pigs have unity!” Joan shouted. “We’ve brought you diversity. Think deep. Consider all the machines we have showed you, the building and the technique. I can name you a thousand things we’ve given you. You will never be the same again.”

“True. We will never be the same,” said the Pilgrim. “You may not be an unmixed curse. I’m a plain man and I don’t know. Surety is one of the things you’ve lost us. But you befouled us. You played the game of Immoralities and taught it to us earthlings.”

“You had it already,” Laurie insisted. “We only brought elegance instead of piggishness to its practice.” Immoralities was Laurie’s own game, and she didn’t like to hear it slighted.

“You have killed many thousands of us in your battles,” said the Pilgrim. “You’re a bitter fruit — sweet at the first taste only.”

“You would yourselves have killed the same numbers in battles, and the battles wouldn’t have been so good,” said Michael. “Do you not realize that we are the higher race have roots of great antiquity.”

“We have roots older than antiquity,” averred the Pilgrim. “You are wicked Children without compassion.”

“Compassion? For the Eretzi?” shouted Lonnie in disbelief.

“Do you have compassion for mice?” demanded Ralph

“Yes. I have compassion for mice,” the Pilgrim said softly.

“I make a guess,” Ralpa shot in shrewdly after they had all repaired their damaged bodies. “You travel as a Pilgrim, and Pilgrims sometimes come from very far away. You are not Eretzi. You are one of the Fathers from Home going in the guise of an Eretzi Pilgrim. You have this routine so that sometimes one of you comes to this world — to see how it goes. You may come to investigate an event said to have happened on Eretz a day ago.”

Ralpa did not mean an Eretzi day ago, but a day ago at Home. The High Road they were on was in Coele-Syria not far from where the Event was thought to have happened, and Ralpa posted his point:

“You are no Eretzi, or you would not dare to confront us, knowing what we are.”

“You guess wrong in this and in everything,” said the Pilgrim. “I am of this Earth, earthly. And I will not be intimidated by a gangle of children of whatever species! You’re a weaker flesh than ourselves. You hide in other bodies, and you get earthlings to do your slaughter. And you cannot stand up to my staff!”

“Go home, you witless weanlings!” and he raised his terrible staff again.

“Our time is nearly up. We will be gone soon,” said Joan softly.

The last game they played? They played Saints — for the Evil they had done in playing Bodies wrongly, and in playing Wars with live soldiers. But they repented of the things only after they had enjoyed them for the Long Afternoon. They played Saints in hairshirt and ashes, and revived that affair among the Eretzi.

And finally they all assembled and took off from the high hill between Prato and Firenze in Italy. The rocks flowed like water where they left, and now there would be a double scarp formation.

They were gone, and that was the end of them here.

There is a theory, however, that one of the Hobbles remained and is with us yet. Hobble and his creature could not be told apart and could not finally tell themselves apart. They flipped an Eretzi coin, Emperors or Shields, to see which one would go and which one would stay. One went and one stayed. One is still here.

But, after all, Hobble was only concerned with the sick toys, the mechanical things, the material inventions. Would it have been better if Ralpa or Joan stayed with us? They'd have burned us crisp by now! They were damnable and irresponsible children.

This short Historical Monograph was not assembled for a distraction or an amusement. We consider the evidence that Children have spent their short vacations here more than once and in both hemispheres. We set out the theses in ordered parallels and we discover that we have begun to tremble unaccountably.

When last came such visitors here? What thing has beset us during the last long Eretzi lifetime?

We consider a new period — and it impinges on the Present — with aspects so different from anything that went before that we can only gasp aghast and gasp in sick wonder:

“Is it ourselves who behave so?

“Is it beings of another sort, or have we become beings?

“Are we ourselves? Are these our deeds?”

There are great deep faces looking over our shoulder, there are cold voices of ancient Children jeering “Compassion? For Earthlings?” there is nasty frozen laughter that does belong to our species.

## NARROW YALLEY

In the year 1893, land allotments in severalty were made to the remaining eight hundred and twenty-one Pawnee Indians. Each would receive one hundred and sixty acres of land and no more, and thereafter the Pawnees would be expected to pay taxes on their land, the same as the White-Eyes did.

“Kitkehahke!” Clarence Big-Saddle cursed. “You can’t kick a dog around proper on a hundred and sixty acres. And I sure am not hear before about this pay taxes on land.”

Clarence Big-Saddle selected a nice green valley for his allotment. It was one of the half dozen plots he had always regarded as his own. He sodded around the summer lodge that he had there and made it an all-season home. But he sure didn’t intend to pay taxes on it.

So he burned leaves and bark and made a speech:

“That my valley be always wide and flourish and green and such stuff as that!” he orated in Pawnee chant style. “But that it be narrow if an intruder come.”

He didn’t have any balsam bark to burn. He threw on a little cedar bark instead. He didn’t have any elder leaves. He used a handful of jack-oak leaves. And he forgot the word. How you going to work it if you forget the word?

“Petahauerat!” he howled out with the confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

“That’s the same long of a word,” he said in a low aside to himself. But he was doubtful. “What am I, a White Man, a burr-tailed jack, a new kind of nut to think it will work?” he asked. “I have to laugh at me. Oh well, we see.”

He threw the rest of the bark and the leaves on the fire, and he hollered the wrong word out again.

And he was answered by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning.

“Skidi!” Clarence Big-Saddle swore. “It worked. I didn’t think it would.”

Clarence Big-Saddle lived on his land for many years, and he paid no taxes. Intruders were unable to come down to his place. The land was sold for taxes three times, but nobody ever came down to claim it. Finally, it was carried as open land on the books. Homesteaders filed on it several



times, but none of them fulfilled the qualification of living on the land.

Half a century went by. Clarence Big-Saddle called his son.

"I've had it, boy," he said. "I think I'll just go in the house and die."

"Okay, Dad," the son Clarence Little-Saddle said. "I'm going in to town to shoot a few games of pool with the boys. I'll bury you when I get back this evening." So the son Clarence Little-Saddle inherited. He also lived on the land for many years without paying taxes.

There was a disturbance in the courthouse one day. The place seemed to be invaded in force, but actually there were but one man, one woman, and five children. "I'm Robert Rampart," said the man, "and we want the Land Office."

"I'm Robert Rampart Junior," said a nine-year-old gangler, "and we want it pretty blamed quick."

"I don't think we have anything like that," the girl at the desk said. "Isn't that something they had a long time ago?"

"Ignorance is no excuse for inefficiency, my dear," said Mary Mabel Rampart, an eight-year-old who could easily pass for eight and a half. "After I make my report, I wonder who will be sitting at your desk tomorrow."

"You people are either in the wrong state or the wrong century," the girl said.

"The Homestead Act still obtains," Robert Rampart insisted. "There is one tract of land carried as open in this county. I want to file on it."

Cecilia Rampart answered the knowing wink of a beefy man at the distant desk. "Hi," she breathed as she slinked over. "I'm Cecilia Rampart, but my stage name is Cecilia San Juan. Do you think that seven is too young to play ingenue roles?"

"Not for you," the man said. "Tell your folks to come over here."

"Do you know where the Land Office is?" Cecilia asked.

"Sure. It's the fourth left-hand drawer of my desk. The smallest office we got in the whole courthouse. We don't use it much any more."

The Ramparts gathered around. The beefy man started to make out the papers.

"This is the land description," Robert Rampart began. "Why, you've got it down already. How did you know?"

"I've been around here a long time," the man answered.

They did the paper work, and Robert Rampart filed on the land.

“You won’t be able to come onto the land itself though,” the man said.

“Why won’t I?” Rampart demanded. “Isn’t the description accurate?”

“Oh, I suppose so. But nobody’s ever been able get to the land. It’s become a sort of joke.”

“Well, I intend to get to the bottom of that joke,” Rampart insisted. “I will occupy the land, or I will fin out why not.”

“I’m not sure about that” the beefy man said. “The last man to file on the land, about a dozen years ago, wasn’t able to occupy the land. And he wasn’t able to say why he couldn’t. It’s kind of interesting, the look on their faces after they try it for a day or two, and then give it up.”

The Ramparts left the courthouse, loaded into their camper, and drove out to find their land. They stopped it at the house of a cattle and wheat farmer named Charley Dublin. Dublin met them with a grin which indicated he had been tipped off.

“Come along if you want to, folks,” Dublin said. “The easiest way is on foot across my short pasture here. Your land’s directly west of mine.”

They walked the short distance to the border.

“My name is Tom Rampart, Mr. Dublin.” Six-year old Tom made conversation as they walked. “But my name is really Ramires, and not Tom. I am the issue of an indiscretion of my mother in Mexico several years ago.”

“The boy is a kidder,” Mr. Dublin,” said the mother Nina Rampart, defending herself. “I have never been in Mexico, but sometimes I have the urge to disappear there forever.”

“Ah yes, Mrs. Rampart. And what is the name of the youngest boy here?” Charley Dublin asked.

“Fatty,” said Fatty Rampart.

(But surely that is not your given name?)

“Audifax,” said five-year-old Fatty.

“Ah well, Audifax, Fatty, are you a kidder too?”

“He’s getting better at it, Mr. Dublin,” Mary Mabel said. “He was a twin till last week. His twin was named Skinny. Mama left Skinny unguarded while she was out tippling, and there were wild dogs in the neighborhood. When Mama got back, do you know what was left of Skinny? Two neck bones and an ankle bone. That was all.”

“Poor Skinny,” Dublin said. “Well, Rampart, this is the fence and the end of my land. Yours is just beyond.”

“Is that ditch on my land?” Rampart asked.

“That ditch is your land.”

“I’ll have it filled in. It’s a dangerous deep cut even if it is narrow. And the other fence looks like a good one, and I sure have a pretty plot of land beyond it.”

“No, Rampart, the land beyond the second fence belongs to Holister Hyde,” Charley Dublin said. “That second fence is the end of your land.”

“Now, just wait a minute, Dublin! There’s something wrong here. My land is one hundred and sixty acres, which would be a half mile on a side. Where’s my half-mile width?”

“Between the two fences.”

“That’s not eight feet.”

“Doesn’t look like it, does it, Rampart? Tell you what — there’s plenty of throwing-sized rocks around. Try to throw one across it.”

“I’m not interested in any such boys’ games,” Rampart exploded. “I want my land.”

But the Rampart children were interested in such games. They got with it with those throwing rocks. They winged them out over the little gully. The stones acted funny. They hung in the air, as it were, and diminished in size. And they were small as pebbles when they dropped down, down into the gully. None of them could throw a stone across that ditch, and they were throwing kids.

“You and your neighbor have conspired to fence open land for your own use,” Rampart charged.

“No such thing, Rampart,” Dublin said cheerfully. “My land checks perfectly. So does Hyde’s. So does yours, if we knew how to check it. It’s like one of those trick topological drawings. It really is half a mile from here to there, but the eye gets lost somewhere. It’s your land. Crawl through the fence and figure it out.”

Rampart crawled through the fence, and drew himself up to jump the gully. Then he hesitated. He a glimpse of just how deep that gully was. Still, it wasn’t five feet across.

There was a heavy fence post on the ground, designed for use as a corner post. Rampart up-ended it with some effort. Then he shoved it to fall and bridge the gully. But it fell short, and it shouldn’t have. An eight-foot post should bridge a five-foot gully.

The post fell into the gully, and rolled and rolled and rolled. It spun as

though it were rolling outward, but it made no progress except vertically. The post came to rest on a ledge of the gully, so close that Rampart could almost reach out and touch it, but it now appeared no bigger than a match stick.

“There is something wrong with that fence post, or with the world, or with my eyes,” Robert Rampart said. “I wish I felt dizzy so I could blame it on that.”

“There’s a little game that I sometimes play with my neighbor Hyde when we’re both out,” Dublin said. “I’ve heavy rifle and I train it on the middle of his forehead as he stands on the other side of the ditch apparently eight feet away. I fire it off then (I’m a good shot) and I hear it whine across. It’d kill him dead if things were as they seem. But Hyde’s in no danger. The shot always bangs into that little scuff of rocks and boulders about thirty feet below him. I can see it kick up the rock dust there, and the sound of it rattling into those little boulders comes back to me in about two and a all seconds.”

A bull-bat (poor people call it the night-hawk) raveled around in the air and zoomed out over the narrow ditch, but it did not reach the other side. The bird dropped below ground level and could be seen against the background of the other side of the ditch. It grew smaller and hazier as though at a distance of three or four hundred yards. The white bars on its wings could no longer be discerned; then the bird itself could hardly be discerned; but it was far short of the other side of the five-foot ditch.

A man identified by Charley Dublin as the neighbor Hollister Hyde had appeared on the other side of the little ditch. Hyde grinned and waved. He shouted something, but could not be heard.

“Hyde and I both read mouths,” Dublin said, “so we can talk across the ditch easy enough. Which kid wants to play chicken? Hyde will barrel a good-sized rock right at your head, and if you duck or flinch you’re chicken.”

“Me! Me!” Audifax Rampart challenged. And Hyde, a big man with big hands, did barrel a fearsome jagged rock right at the head of the boy. It would have killed him if things had been as they appeared. But the rock diminished to nothing and disappeared into the ditch. Here was a phenomenon: things seemed real-sized on either side of the ditch, but they diminished coming out over the ditch either way.

“Everybody game for it?” Robert Rampart Junior asked.

“We won’t get down there by standing here,” Mary Mabel said.

“Nothing wenchered, nothing gained,” said Cecilia. “I got that from an ad for a sex comedy.”

Then the five Rampart kids ran down into the gully. Ran down is right. It was almost as if they ran down the vertical face of a cliff. They couldn’t do that. The gully was no wider than the stride of the biggest kids. But the gully diminished those children, it ate them alive. They were doll-sized. They were acorn-sized. They were running for minute after minute across a ditch that was only five feet across. They were going, deeper in it, and getting smaller. Robert Rampart was roaring his alarm, and his wife Nina was screaming. Then she stopped. “What am I carrying on so loud about?” she asked herself. “It looks like fun. I’ll do it too.”

She plunged into the gully, diminished in size as the children had done, and ran at a pace to carry her a hundred yards away across a gully only five feet wide.

That Robert Rampart stirred things up for a while then. He got the sheriff there, and the highway patrolmen. A ditch had stolen his wife and five children, he said, and maybe had killed them. And if anybody laughs, there may be another killing. He got the colonel of the State National Guard there, and a command post set up. He got a couple of airplane pilots. Robert Rampart had one quality: when he hollered, people came.

He got the newsmen out from T-Town, and the eminent scientists, Dr. Velikof Vonk, Arpad Arkabaranan, and Willy McGilly. That bunch turns up every time you get on a good one. They just happen to be in that part of the country where something interesting is going on.

They attacked the thing from all four sides and the top, and by inner and outer theory. If a thing measures half a mile on each side, and the sides are straight, there just has to be something in the middle of it. They took pictures from the air, and they turned out perfect. They proved that Robert Rampart had the prettiest hundred and sixty acres in the country, the larger part of it being a lush green valley, and all of it being half a mile on a side, and situated just where it should be. They took ground-level photos then, and it showed a beautiful half-mile stretch of land between the boundaries of Charley Dublin and Hollister Hyde. But a man isn’t a camera. None of them could see that beautiful spread with the eyes in their heads. Where was it?

Down in the valley itself everything was normal. It really was half a

mile wide and no more than eighty feet deep with a very gentle slope. It was warm and sweet, and beautiful with grass and grain.

Nina and the kids loved it, and they rushed to see what squatter had built that little house on their land. A house, or a shack. It had never known paint, but paint would have spoiled it. It was built of split timbers dressed near smooth with ax and draw knife, chinked with white clay, and sodded up to about half its height. And there was an interloper standing by the little lodge.

“Here, here what are you doing on our land?” Robert Rampart Junior demanded of the man. “Now you just shamle off again wherever you came from. I’ll bet you’re a thief too, and those cattle are stolen.”

“Only the black-and-white calf,” Clarence Little-Saddle said. “I couldn’t resist him, but the rest are mine. I guess I’ll just stay around and see that you folks get settled all right.”

“Is there any wild Indians around here?” Fatty Rampart asked.

“No, not really. I go on a bender about every three months and get a little bit wild, and there’s a couple Osage boys from Gray Horse that get noisy sometimes, but that’s about all,” Clarence Little-Saddle said.

“You certainly don’t intend to palm yourself off on us as an Indian,” Mary Mabel challenged. “You’ll find us a little too knowledgeable for that.”

“Little girl, you might as well tell this cow there’s no room for her to be a cow since you’re so knowledgeable. She thinks she’s a short-horn cow named Sweet Virginia; I think I’m a Pawnee Indian named Clarence. Break it to us real gentle if we’re not.”

“If you’re an Indian where’s your war bonnet? There’s not a feather on you anywhere.”

“How you be sure? There’s a story that we got feathers instead of hair on — Aw, I can’t tell a joke like that to a little girl! How come you’re not wearing the Iron Crown of Lombardy if you’re a white girl? How you expect me to believe you’re a little white girl and your folks came from Europe a couple hundred years ago if you don’t wear it? There are six hundred tribes, and only one of them, the Oglala Sioux, had the war bonnet, and only the big leaders, never more than two or three of them alive at one time, wore it.”

“Your analogy is a little strained,” Mary Mabel said. “Those Indians we saw in Florida and the ones at Atlantic City had war bonnets, and they

couldn't very well have been the kind of Sioux you said. And just last night on the TV in the motel, those Massachusetts Indians put a war bonnet on the President and called him the Great White Father. You mean to tell me that they were all phonies? Hey, who's laughing at who here?"

"If you're an Indian where's your bow and arrow?" Tom Rampart interrupted. "I bet you can't even shoot one."

"You're sure right there," Clarence admitted. "I never shot one of those things but once in my life. They used to have an archery range in Boulder Park over in T-Town, and you could rent the things and shoot at targets tied to hay bales. Hey, I barked my whole forearm and nearly broke my thumb when the bow-string thwacked home. I couldn't shoot that thing at all. I don't see how anybody ever could shoot one of them."

"Okay, kids," Nina Rampart called to her brood. "Let's start pitching this junk out of the shack so we can move in. Is there any way we can drive our camper down here, Clarence?"

"Sure, there's a pretty good dirt road, and it's a lot wider than it looks from the top. I got a bunch of green bills in an old night charley in the shack. Let me get them, and then I'll clear out for a while. The shack hasn't been cleaned out for seven years, since the last time this happened. I'll show you the road to the top, and you can bring your car down it."

"Hey, you old Indian, you lied!" Cecilia Rampart shrilled from the doorway of the shack. "You do have a war bonnet. Can I have it?"

"I didn't mean to lie, I forgot about that thing," Clarence Little-Saddle said. "My son Clarence Bare-Back sent that to me from Japan for a joke a long time ago. Sure, you can have it."

All the children were assigned tasks carrying the junk out of the shack and setting fire to it. Nina Rampart and Clarence Little-Saddle ambled up to the rim of the valley by the vehicle road that was wider than it looked from the top.

"Nina, you're back! I thought you were gone forever, Robert Rampart jittered at seeing her again. "What — where are the children?"

"Why, I left them down in the valley, Robert. That is, ah, down in that little ditch right there. Now you've got me worried again. I'm going to drive the camper down there and unload it. You'd better go on down and lend a hand too, Robert, and quit talking to all these funny-looking men here."

And Nina went back to Dublin's place for the camper. "It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for that intrepid woman to drive a car down into that narrow ditch," the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk said.

"You know how that camel does it?" Clarence Little-Saddle offered, appearing of a sudden from nowhere. "He just closes one of his own eyes and flops back his ears and plunges right through. A camel is mighty narrow when he closes one eye and flops back his ears. Besides, they use a big-eyed needle in the act."

"Where'd this crazy man come from?" Robert Rampart demanded, jumping three feet in the air. "Things are coming out of the ground now. I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife! Whoops, here she comes driving it. Nina, you can't drive a loaded camper into a little ditch like that! You'll be killed or collapsed!"

Nina Rampart drove the loaded camper into the little ditch at a pretty good rate of speed. The best of belief is that she just closed one eye and plunged right through. The car diminished and dropped, and it was smaller than a toy car. But it raised a pretty good cloud of dust as it bumped for several hundred yards across a ditch that was only five feet wide.

"Rampart, it's akin to the phenomenon known as looming, only in reverse," the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan explained as he attempted to throw a rock across the narrow ditch. The rock rose very high in the air, seemed to hang at its apex while it diminished to the size of a grain of sand, and then fell into the ditch not six inches of the way across. There isn't anybody going to throw across a half-mile valley even if it looks five feet. "Look at a rising moon sometimes, Rampart. It appears very large, as though covering a great sector of the horizon, but it only covers one-half of a degree. It is hard to believe that you could set seven hundred and twenty of such large moons side by side around the horizon, or that it would take one hundred and eighty of the big things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead. It is also hard to believe that your valley is twelve hundred times as wide as it appears, but it has been surveyed, and it is."

"I want my land. I want my children. I want my wife," Robert chanted dully. "Damn, I let her get away again."

"I tell you, Rampy," Clarence Little-Saddle squared on him, "a man



that lets his wife get away twice doesn't deserve to keep her. I give you till nightfall; then you forfeit. I've taken a liking to the brood. One of us is going to be down there tonight."

After a while a bunch of them were off in that little tavern on the road between Cleveland and Osage. It was only half a mile away. If the valley had run in the other direction, it would have been only six feet away.

"It is a psychic nexus in the form of an elongated dome," said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk. "It is maintained subconsciously by the concatenation of at least two minds, the stronger of them belonging to a man dead for many years. It has apparently existed for a little less than a hundred years, and in another hundred years it will be considerably weakened. We know from our checking out folk tales of Europe as well as Cambodia that these ensorceled areas seldom survive for more than two hundred and fifty years. The person who first set such a thing in being will usually lose interest in it, and in all worldly things, within a hundred years of his own death. This is a simple thanato-psychic limitation. As a short-term device, the thing has been used several times as a military tactic.

"This psychic nexus, as long as it maintains itself, causes group illusion, but it is really a simple thing. It doesn't fool birds or rabbits or cattle, or cameras, only humans. There is nothing meteorological about it. It is strictly psychological. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to it or it would have worried me."

"It is continental fault coinciding with a noospheric fault," said the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan. "The valley really is half a mile wide, and at the same time it really is only five feet wide. If we measured correctly, we would get these dual measurements. Of course it is meteorological! Everything including dreams is meteorological. It is the animals and cameras which are fooled, as lacking a true dimension; it is only humans who see the true duality. The phenomenon should be common along the whole continental fault where the earth gains or loses half a mile that has to go somewhere. Likely it extends through the whole sweep of the Cross Timbers. Many of those trees appear twice, and many do not appear at all. A man in the proper state of mind could farm that land or raise cattle on it, but it doesn't really exist. There is a clear parallel in the Luftspiegelungthal sector in the Black Forest of Germany which exists, or does not exist, according to the circumstances and to the

attitude of the beholder. Then we have the case of Mad Mountain in Morgan; County, Tennessee, which isn't there all the time; and also the Little Lobo Mirage south of Presidio, Texas, from which twenty thousand barrels of water were pumped in one two-and-a-half-year period before the mirage reverted to mirage status. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to this or it would have worried me."

"I just don't understand how he worked it," said the eminent scientist Willy McGilly; "Cedar bark, jack-oak leaves, and the word 'Petahauerat.' The thing's impossible! When I was a boy and we wanted to make a hide-out, we used bark from the skunk-spruce tree, the leaves of a box-elder, and the word was 'Boadicea.' All three elements are wrong here. I cannot find a scientific explanation for it, and it does worry me."

They went back to Narrow Valley. Robert Rampart was still chanting dully: "I want my land. I want my children. I want my wife."

Nina Rampart came chugging up out of the narrow ditch in the camper and emerged through that little gate a few yards down the fence row.

"Supper's ready and we're tired of waiting for you, Robert," she said. "A fine homesteader you are! Afraid to come onto your own land! Come along now; I'm tired of waiting for you."

"I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife!" Robert Rampart still chanted. "Oh, there you are, Nina. You stay here this time. I want my land! I want my children! I want an answer to this terrible thing."

"It is time we decided who wears the pants in this family," Nina said stoutly. She picked up her husband, slung him over her shoulder, carried him to the camper and dumped him in, slammed (as it seemed) a dozen doors at once, and drove furiously down into the Narrow Valley, which already seemed wider.

Why, that place was getting normaler and normaler the minute! Pretty soon it looked almost as wide as was supposed to be. The psychic nexus in the form an elongated dome had collapsed. The continental fault that coincided with the noospheric fault had faced facts and decided to conform. The Ramparts were in effective possession of their homestead, and Narrow Valley was as normal as any place anywhere.

"I have lost my land," Clarence Little-Saddle moaned. "It was the land of my father Clarence Big-Saddle, and I meant it to be the land of my son

Clarence Bare-Back. It looked so narrow that people did not notice how wide it was, and people did not try to enter it. Now I have lost it.”

Clarence Little-Saddle and the eminent scientist Willy McGilly were standing on the edge of Narrow Valley, which now appeared its true half-mile extent. The moon was just rising, so big that it filled a third of the sky. Who would have imagined that it would take a hundred and eight of such monstrous things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead, and yet you could sight it with sighters and figure it so.

“I had a little bear-cat by the tail and I let go,” Clarence groaned. “I had a fine valley for free, and I have lost it. I am like that hard-luck guy in the funny-paper or Job in the Bible. Destitution is my lot.”

Willy McGilly looked around furtively. They were alone on the edge of the half-mile-wide valley.

“Let’s give it a booster shot,” Willy McGilly said.

Hey, those two got with it! They started a snapping fire and began to throw the stuff onto it. Bark from the dog-elm tree — how do you know it won’t work?

It was working! Already the other side of the valley seemed a hundred yards closer, and there were alarmed noises coming up from the people in the valley.

Leaves from a black locust tree-and the valley narrowed still more! There was, more over, terrified screaming of both children and big people from the depths of Narrow Valley, and the happy voice of Mary Mabel Rampart chanting “Earthquake! Earthquake!”

“That my valley be always wide and flourish and such stuff, and green with money and grass!” Clarence Little-Saddle orated in Pawnee chant style, “but that it be narrow if intruders come, smash them like bugs!”

People, that valley wasn’t over a hundred feet wide; now, and the screaming of the people in the bottom of the valley had been joined by the hysterical coughing of the camper car staring up.

Willy and Clarence threw everything that was left on the fire. But the word? The word? Who remembers the word?

“Corsicanatexas!” Clarence Little-Saddle howled out with confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

He was answered not only by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning, but also by thunder and raindrops.

“Chahiksi!” Clarence Little-Saddle swore. “It worked. I didn’t think it

would. It will be all right now. I can use the rain.”

The valley was again a ditch only five feet wide.

The camper car struggled out of Narrow Valley through the little gate. It was smashed flat as a sheet of paper, and the screaming kids and people in it had only one dimension.

“It’s closing in! It’s closing in!” Robert Rampart roared, and he was no thicker than if he had been made out of cardboard.

“We’re smashed like bugs,” the Rampart boys intoned. “We’re thin like paper.

“Mort, ruine, ecrasement!” spoke-acted Cecilia Rampart like the great tragedienne she was.

“Help! Help!” Nina Rampart croaked, but she winked at Willy and Clarence as they rolled by. “This homesteading jag always did leave me a little flat.”

“Don’t throw those paper dolls away. They might be the Ramparts,” Mary Mabel called.

The camper car coughed again and bumped along on level ground. This couldn’t last forever. The car was widening out as it bumped along.

“Did we overdo it, Clarence?” Willy McGilly asked. “What did one flat-lander say to the other?”

“Dimension of us never got around,” Clarence said. “No, I don’t think we overdid it, Willy. That car must be eighteen inches wide already, and they all ought to be normal by the time they reach the main road. The next time I do it, I think I’ll throw wood-grain plastic on the fire to see who’s kidding who.”

## PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI

ABSTRACT FROM JOINT REPORT TO THE GENERAL DUBUQUE PTA  
CONCERNING THE PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI,  
Subtitled Critical Observations of a Parallel Culture on a Neighboring  
World, and Evaluations of THE OTHER WAY OF EDUCATION.

Extract from the Day Book:

“Where,” we asked the Information Factor at Camiroi City Terminal,  
“is the office of the local PTA?”

“Isn’t any,” he said cheerfully.

“You mean that in Camiroi City, the metropolis of the planet, there is  
no PTA?” our chairman Paul Piper asked with disbelief.

“Isn’t any office of it. But you’re poor strangers, so you deserve an  
answer even if you can’t frame your questions properly. See that elderly  
man sitting on the bench and enjoying the sun? Go tell him you need a  
PTA. He’ll make you one.”

“Perhaps the initials convey a different meaning on Camiroi,” said  
Miss Munch, the first surrogate chairman. “By them we mean —” “Parent  
Teachers Apparatus, of course. Colloquial English is one of the six  
Earthian languages required here, you know. Don’t be abashed. He’s a  
fine person, and he enjoys doing things for strangers. He’ll be glad to  
make you a PTA.”

We were nonplussed, but we walked over to the man indicated.

“We are looking for the local PTA, sir,” said Miss Smice, our second  
surrogate chairman. “We were told that you might help us.”

“Oh, certainly,” said the elderly Camiroi gentleman. “One of you arrest  
that man walking there. and we’ll get started with it.”

“Do what?” asked our Mr. Piper.

“Arrest him. I have noticed that your own words sometimes do not  
convey a meaning to you. I often wonder how you do communicate  
among yourselves. Arrest, take into custody, seize by any force physical or  
moral, and bring him here.”

“Yes, sir,” cried Miss Hanks, our third surrogate chairman. She  
enjoyed things like this. She arrested the walking Camiroi man with force  
partly physical and partly moral and brought him to the group.

“It’s a PTA they want, Meander,” the elder Camiroi said to the one

arrested. “Grab three more, and we’ll get started. Let the lady help. She’s good at it.”

Our Miss Hanks and the Camiroi man named Meander arrested three other Camiroi men and brought them to the group.

“Five. It’s enough,” said the elderly Camiroi. “We are hereby constituted a PTA and ordered into random action. Now, how can we accommodate you, good Earth people?”

“But are you legal? Are you five persons competent to be a PTA?” demanded our Mr. Piper.

“Any Camiroi citizen is competent to do any job on the planet of Camiroi,” said one of the Camiroi men (we learned later that his name was Talarium), “otherwise Camiroi would be in a sad shape.”

“It may be,” said our Miss Smice sourly. “It all seems very informal. What if one of you had to be World President?”

“The odds are that it won’t come to one man in ten,” said the elderly Camiroi (his name was Philoxenus). “I’m the only one of this group ever to serve as president of this Planet, and it was a pleasant week I spent in the Office. Now to the point. How can we accommodate you?”

“We would like to see one of your schools in session,” said our Mr. Piper. “We would like to talk to the teachers and the students. We are here to compare the two systems of education.”

“There is no comparison,” said old Philoxenus, “— meaning no offense. Or no more than a little. On Camiroi, we practice Education. On Earth, they play a game, but they call it by the same name. That makes the confusion. Come. We’ll go to a school in session.”

“And to a public school,” said Miss Smice suspiciously. “Do not fob off any fancy private school on us as typical.”

“That would be difficult,” said Philoxenus. “There is no public school in Camiroi City and only two remaining on the Planet. Only a small fraction of one percent of the students of Camiroi are in public schools. We maintain that there is no more reason for the majority of children to be educated in a public school than to be raised in a public orphanage. We realize, of course, that on Earth you have made a sacred buffalo of the public school”

“Sacred cow,” said our Mr. Piper.

“Children and Earthlings should be corrected when they use words wrongly,” said Philoxenus. “How else will they learn the correct forms?”

The animal held sacred in your own near Orient was of the species *bos bubalus* rather than *bos bos*, a buffalo rather than a cow. Shall we go to a school?"

"If it cannot be a public school, at least let it be a typical school," said Miss Smice.

"That again is impossible," said Philoxenus. "Every school on Camiroi is in some respect atypical."

We went to visit an atypical school.

INCIDENT: Our first contact with the Camiroi students was a violent one. One of them, a lively little boy about eight years old, ran into Miss Munch, knocked her down, and broke her glasses. Then he jabbered something in an unknown tongue.

"Is that Camiroi?" asked Mr. Piper with interest. "From what I have heard, I supposed the language to have a harsher and fuller sound."

"You mean you don't recognize it?" asked Philoxenus with amusement "What a droll admission from an educator. The boy is very young and very ignorant. Seeing that you were Earthians, he spoke in Hindi, which the tongue used by more Earthians than any other. No, no, Xypete, they are of the minority who speak English. You can tell it by their colorless texture and the narrow heads on them."

"I say you sure do have slow reaction, lady," the little boy Xypete explained. "Even subhumans should react faster than that. You just stand there and gape and let me bowl you over. You want me analyze you and see why you react so slow?"

"No! No!"

"You seem unhurt in structure from the fall," the little boy continued, "but if I hurt you I got to fix you. Just strip down to your shift, and I'll go over you and make sure you're all right"

"No! No! No!"

"It's all right," said Philoxenus. "All Camiroi children learn primary medicine in the first grade, setting bones and healing contusions and such."

"No! No! I'm all right But he's broken my glasses."

"Come along, Earthside lady, I'll make you so others," said the little boy. "With your slow reaction time you sure can't afford the added handicap of defective vision. Shall I fit you with contacts?"

"No. I want glasses just like those which were broken. Oh heavens,

what will I do?”

“You come, I do,” said the little boy. It was rather revealing to us that the little boy was able to test Miss Munch’s eyes, grind lenses, make frames and have her fixed up within three minutes. “I have made some improvements over those you wore before,” the boy said, “to help compensate for your slow reaction time.”

“Are all the Camiroi students so talented?” Mr. Piper asked. He was impressed.

“No. Xypete is unusual,” Philoxenus said. “Most students would not be able to make a pair of glasses so quickly or competently till they were at least nine.”

RANDOM INTERVIEW<sup>5</sup>: “How rapidly do you read?” Miss Hanks asked a young girl.

“One hundred and twenty words a minute,” the girl said.

“On Earth some of the girl students your age have learned to read at the rate of five hundred words a minute,” Miss Hanks said proudly.

“When I began disciplined reading, I was reading at the rate of four thousand words a minute,” the girl said. “They had quite a time correcting me of it. I had to take remedial reading, and my parents were ashamed of me. Now I’ve learned to read almost slow enough.”

“I don’t understand,” said Miss Hanks.

“Do you know anything about Earth History or Geography?” Miss Smice asked a middle-sized boy.

“We sure are sketchy on it, lady. There isn’t very much over there, is there?”

“Then you have never heard of Dubuque?”

“Count Dubuque interests me. I can’t say as much for the city named after him. I always thought that the Count handled the matters of the conflicting French and Spanish land grants and the basic claims of the Sauk and Fox Indians very well. References to the town now carry a humorous connotation, and ‘School-Teacher from Dubuque’ has become a folk archetype.”

“Thank you,” said Miss Smice, “or do I thank you?”

“What are you taught of the relative humanity of the Earthians and the Camiroi and of their origins?” Miss Munch asked a Camiroi girl.

“The other four worlds, Earth (Gaea), Kentauron Mikron, Dahae and Astrobe were all settled from Camiroi. That is what we are taught We are



also given the humorous aside that if it isn't true we will still hold it true till something better comes along. It was we who rediscovered the Four Worlds in historic time, not they who discovered us. If we did not make the original settlements, at least we have filed the first claim that we made them. We did, in historical time, make an additional colonization of Earth. You call it the Incursion of the Dorian Greeks."

"Where are their playgrounds?" Miss Hanks asked Talarium.

"Oh, the whole world. The children have the run of everything. To set up specific playgrounds would be like setting a table-sized aquarium down in the depths of the ocean. It would really be pointless."

CONFERENCE: The four of us from Earth, specifically from Dubuque, Iowa, were in discussion with the five members of the Camiroi PTA.

"How do you maintain discipline?" Mr. Piper asked,

"Indifferently," said Philoxenus. "Oh, you mean in detail. It varies. Sometimes we let it drift, sometimes we pull them up short. Once they have learned that they must comply to an extent, there is little trouble. Small children are often put down into a pit. They do not eat or come out till they know their assignment."

"But that is inhuman," said Miss Hanks.

"Of course. But small children are not yet entirely human. If a child has not learned to accept discipline by the third or fourth grade, he is hanged."

"Literally?" asked Miss Munch.

"How would you hang a child figuratively? And effect would that have on the older children?"

"By the neck?" Miss Munch still was not satisfied.

"By the neck until they are dead. The other children always accept the example gracefully and do better. Hanging isn't employed often. Scarcely one child in a hundred is hanged."

"What is this business about slow reading?" Miss Hanks asked. "I don't understand it at all."

"Only the other day there was a child in the third grade who persisted in rapid reading," Philoxenus said. "He was given an object lesson. He was given a book of medium difficulty, and he read it rapidly. Then he had to put the book away and repeat what he had read. Do you know that in the first thirty pages he missed four words? Midway in the book there was a whole statement which he had understood wrongly, and there were

hundreds of pages that he got word-perfect only with difficulty. If he was so unsure on material that he had just read, think how imperfectly he would have recalled it forty years later.”

“You mean that the Camiroi children learn to recall everything that they read?”

“The Camiroi children and adults will recall for life every detail they have ever seen, read or heard. We on Camiroi are only a little more intelligent than you on Earth. We cannot afford to waste time in forgetting or reviewing or in pursuing anything of a shallowness that lends itself to scanning.”

“Ah, would you call your schools liberal?” Mr. Piper asked.

“I would. You wouldn’t,” said Philoxenus. “We do not on Camiroi, as you do on Earth, use words to mean their opposites. There is nothing in our education or on our world that corresponds to the quaint servility which you call liberal on Earth.”

“Well, would you call your education progressive?”

“No. In your argot, progressive, of course, means infantile.”

“How are the schools financed?” asked Mr. Piper.

“Oh the voluntary tithe on Camiroi takes care of everything, government, religion, education, public works. We don’t believe in taxes, of course, and we never maintain a high overhead in anything.”

“Just how voluntary is the tithing?” asked Miss Hanks. “Do you sometimes hang those who do not tithe voluntarily?”

“I believe there have been a few cases of that sort,” said Philoxenus.

“And is your government really as slipshod as your education?” Mr. Piper asked. “Are your high officials really chosen by lot and for short periods?”

“Oh yes. Can you imagine a person so sick that he would actually desire to hold high office for any great period of time? Are there any further questions?”

“There must be hundreds,” said Mr. Piper, “But we find difficulty putting them into words.”

“If you cannot find words for them, we cannot find answers. PTA disbanded.”

**CONCLUSION A:** The Camiroi system of education is inferior to our own in organization, in buildings, in facilities, in playgrounds, in teacher conferences, in funding, in parental involvement, in supervision, in in-

group out-group accommodation adjustment motifs. Some of the school buildings are grotesque. We asked about one particular building which seemed to us to be flamboyant and in bad taste. “What do you expect from second-grade children?” they said. “It is well built even if of peculiar appearance. Second-grade children are not yet complete artists of design.”

“You mean that the children designed it themselves?” we asked.

“Of course,” they said. “Designed and built it. It isn’t a bad job for children.”

Such a thing wouldn’t be permitted on Earth.

CONCLUSION B: The Camiroi system of education somehow produces much better results than does the education system of Earth. We have been forced to admit this by the evidence at hand.

CONCLUSION C: There is an anomaly as yet unresolved between Conclusion A and Conclusion B.

#### APPENDIX

#### TO JOINT REPORT

We give here, as perhaps of some interest, the curriculum of the Camiroi Primary Education.

#### FIRST YEAR COURSE:

Playing one wind instrument

Simple drawing of objects and numbers.

Singing. (This is important Many Earth people sing who cannot sing. This early instruction of the Camiroi prevents that occurrence.)

Simple arithmetic, hand and machine.

First acrobatics.

First riddles and logic.

Mnemonic religion.

First dancing.

Walking the low wire.

Simple electric circuits.

Raising ants. (Eoempts, not Earth ants).

#### SECOND YEAR COURSE

Playing one keyboard instrument

Drawing, faces, letters, motions.

Singing comedies.

Complex arithmetic, hand and machine.

Second acrobatics.

First jokes and logic.

Quadratic religion.

Second dancing.

Simple defamation. (Spirited attacks on the character of one fellow student, with elementary falsification and simple hatchet-job programming.)

Performing on the medium wire.

Project electric wiring.

Raising bees. (Galelea, not Earth bees.)

Reading and voice. (It is here that the student who may have fallen into bad habits of rapid reading is compelled to read at voice speed only.)

Soft stone sculpture.

Situation comedy.

Simple algebra, hand and machine.

First gymnastics.

Second jokes and logic.

Transcendent religion.

Complex acrobatic dancing.

Complex defamation.

Performing on the high wire and the sky pole.

Simple radio construction.

Raising, breeding and dissecting frogs. (Karakoh, not Earth frogs.)

FOURTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, basic and geological.

Decadent comedy.

Simple geometry and trigonometry, hand and machine.

Track and field.

Shaggy people jokes and hirsute logic.

Simple obscenity.

Simple mysticism.

Patterns of falsification.

Trapeze work.

Intermediate electronics.

Human dissection.

FIFTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, technological.

Introverted drama.

Complex geometries and analytics, hand and machine.

Track and field for fifth form record.

First wit and logic.

First alcoholic appreciation.

Complex mysticism.

Setting intellectual climates, defamation in three dimensions.

Simple Oratory.

Complex trapeze work.

Inorganic chemistry.

Advanced electronics.

Advanced human dissection.

Fifth Form Thesis.

The child is now ten years old and is half through his primary schooling. He is an unfinished animal, but he has learned to learn.

SIXTH YEAR COURSE:

Reemphasis on slow reading.

Simple prodigious memory.

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, economic.

Horsemanship (of the Patrushkoe, not the Earth horse.)

Advance lathe and machine work for art and utility.

Literature, passive.

Calculi, hand and machine pankration.

Advanced wit and logic.

Second alcoholic appreciation.

Differential religion.

First business ventures.

Complex oratory.

Building-scaling. (The buildings are higher and the gravity stronger than on Earth; this climbing of buildings like human flies calls out the ingenuity and daring of the Camiroi children.)

Nuclear physics and post-organic chemistry.

Simple pseudo-human assembly.

SEVENTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, cultural.

Advanced prodigious memory.

Vehicle operation and manufacture of simple vehicle.

Literature, active.

Astrognosy, prediction and programming.

Advanced pankration.

Spherical logic, hand and machine.

Advanced alcoholic appreciation.

Integral religion.

Bankruptcy and recovery in business.

Conmanship and trend creation.

Post-nuclear physics and universals.

Transcendental athletics endeavor.

Complex robotics and programming.

EIGHTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, seminal theory.

Consummate prodigious memory.

Manufacture of complex land and water vehicles.

Literature, compenduous and terminative. (Creative book-burning following the Camiroi thesis that nothing ordinary be allowed to survive.)

Cosmic theory, seminal.

Philosophy construction.

Complex hedonism.

Laser religion.

Conmanship, seminal.

Consolidation of simple genius status.

Post-robotic integration.

NINTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, future and contingent.

Category invention.

Manufacture of complex light-barrier vehicles.

Construction of simple asteroids and planets.

Matrix religion and logic.

Simple human immortality disciplines.

Consolidation of complex genius status.

First problems of post-consciousness humanity.

First essays in marriage and reproduction.

TENTH YEAR COURSE:

History construction, active.

Manufacture of ultra-light-barrier vehicles.

Panphilosophical clarifications.

Construction of viable planets.

Consolidation of simple sanctity status.

Charismatic humor and pentacomic logic.

Hypogyroscopic economy.

Penentaglossia. (The perfection of the fifty languages that every educated Camiroi must know including six Earthian languages. Of course the child will already have colloquial mastery of most of these, but he will not yet have them in their full depth.)

Construction of complex societies.

World government. (A course of the same name is sometimes given in Earthian schools, but the course is not of the same content. In this course the Camiroi student will govern a world, though not one of the first aspect worlds, for a period of three or four months.)

Tenth form thesis.

#### COMMENT ON CURRICULUM:

The child will now be fifteen years old and will have completed his primary education. In many ways he will be advanced beyond his Earth counterpart. Physically more sophisticated, the Camiroi child could kill with his hands an Earth-type tiger or a cape buffalo. An Earth child would perhaps be reluctant even to attempt such feats. The Camiroi boy (or girl) could replace any professional Earth athlete at any position of any game, and could surpass all existing Earth records. It is simply a question of finer poise, strength and speed, the result of adequate schooling.

As to the arts (on which Earthlings sometimes place emphasis) the Camiroi child could produce easy and unequalled masterpieces in any medium. More important, he will have learned the relative unimportance of such pastimes.

The Camiroi child will have failed in business once, at age ten, and have learned patience and perfection of objective by his failure. He will have acquired the techniques of falsification and conmanship. Thereafter he will not be easily deceived by any of the citizens of any of the worlds. The Camiroi child will have become a complex genius and a simple saint; the latter reduces the index of Camiroi crime to near zero. He will be married and settled in those early years of greatest enjoyment.

The child will have built, from materials found around any Camiroi

house, a faster-than-light vehicle. He will have piloted it on a significant journey of his own plotting and programming. He will have built quasi-human robots of great intricacy. He will be of perfect memory and judgment and will be well prepared to accept solid learning.

He will have learned to use his whole mind, for the vast reservoirs which are the unconscious to us are not unconscious to him. Everything in him is ordered for use. And there seems to be no great secret about the accomplishments) only to do everything slowly enough and in the right order: thus they avoid repetition and drill which are the shriveling things which dull the quick apperception.

The Camiroi schedule is challenging to the children, but it is nowhere impossible or discouraging. Everything builds to what follows. For instance, the child is eleven years old before he is given post-nuclear physics and universals. Such subjects might be too difficult for him at an earlier age. He is thirteen years old before he undertakes category invention, that intricate course with the simple name. He is fourteen years old when he enters the dangerous field of panphilosophical clarification. But he will have been constructing comprehensive philosophies for two years, and he will have the background for the final clarification.

We should look more closely at this other way of education. In some respects it is better than our own. Few Earth children would be able to construct an organic and sentient robot within fifteen minutes if given the test suddenly; most of them could not manufacture a living dog in that time. Not one Earth child in five could build a faster-than-light vehicle and travel it beyond our galaxy between now and midnight. Not one Earth child in a hundred could build a planet and have it a going concern within a week. Not one in a thousand would be able to comprehend pentacosmic logic.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a.) Kidnapping five Camiroi at random and constituting them a pilot Earth PTA.
- b.) A little constructive book-burning, particularly in the education field.
- c.) Judicious hanging of certain malingering students.



## **POLITY AND CUSTOM OF THE CAMIROI**

### **ABSTRACT FROM REPORT OF FIELD GROUP FOR EXAMINATION OF OFF-EARTH CUSTOMS AND CODEXES TO THE COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT RENOVATION AND LEGAL RETHINKING.**

Extract from the day book of Paul Piggott, political analyst:

Making appointments with the Camiroi is proverbially like building with quicksilver. We discovered this early. But they do have the most advanced civilization of any of the four human worlds. And we did have a firm invitation to visit the planet Carnfroi and to investigate customs. And we had the promise that we would be taken in hand immediately on our arrival by a group parallel to our own.

But there was no group to meet us at the Sky-Port. "Where is the Group for the Examination of Customs and Codexes?" we asked the girl who was on duty as Information Factor at the Sky-Port.

"Ask that post over there," she said. She was a young lady of mischievous and almost rakish mien.

"I hope we are not reduced to talking to posts," said our leader, Charles Chosky, "but I see that it is some sort of communicating device. Does the post talk English, young lady?"

"The post understands the fifty languages that all Camiroi know," the young lady said. "On Camiroi, even the dogs speak fifty languages. Speak to it."

"I'll try it," said Mr. Chosky. "Ah, post, we were to be taken in hand by a group parallel to our own. Where can we find the Group for the Examination of Customs and Codexes?"

"Duty! Duty!" cried the post in a girlish voice that was somehow familiar. "Three for a group! Come, come, be constituted!"

"I'll be one," said a pleasant-looking Camiroi, striding over.

"I'll be another," said a teen-age sproutling boy of the same species.

"One more, one more!" cried the post. "Oh, here comes my relief. I'll be the other one to form the group. Come, come, let's get started. What do you want to see first, good people?"

"How can a post be a member of an ambulatory group?" Charles Chosky asked.

"Oh, don't be quaint," said the girl who had been the information

factor and also the voice of the post. She had come up behind us and joined us. "Sideki and Nautes, we become a group for cozening Earthlings," she said. "I am sure you heard the rather humorous name they gave it."

"Are you as a group qualified to give us the information we seek?" I asked.

"Every citizen of Camiroi is qualified, in theory, to give sound information on every subject," said the teen-age sproutling.

"But in practice it may not be so," I said, my legal mind fastening onto his phrase.

"The only difficulty is our over-liberal admission to citizenship," said Miss Diayggeia, who had been the voice of the post and the Information Factor. "Any person may become a citizen of Camiroi if he has resided here for one oodle. Once it was so that only natural leaders traveled space, and they qualified. Now, however, there are subsidized persons of no ability who come. They do not always conform to our high standard of reason and information."

"Thanks," said our Miss Holly Holm, "and how long is an oodle?"

"About fifteen minutes," said Miss Dia. "The post will register you now if you wish."

The post registered us, and we became citizens of Camiroi.

"Well, come, come, fellow citizens, what can we do for you?" asked Sideld, the pleasant-looking Camiroi who was the first member of our host group.

"Our reports of the laws of Gamirci seem to be a mixture of travelers' tales and nonsense," I said. "We want to find how a Camiroi law is made and how it works."

"So, make one, citizens, and see how it works," said Sideki. "You are now citizens like any other citizens, and any three of you can band together and make a law. Let us go down to Archives and enact it And you be thinking what sort of law it will be as we go there."

We strode through the contrived and beautiful parklands and groves which were the roofs of Camfroi City. The extent was full of fountains and waterfalls, and streams with bizarre bridges over them. Some were better than others. Some were better than anything we had ever seen anywhere.

"But I believe that I myself could design a pond and weir as good as this one," said Charles Chosky, our leader. "And I'd have some of those

bushes that look like Earth sumac in place of that cluster there; and I'd break up that pattern of rocks and tilt the layered massif behind it, and bring in a little of that blue moss —”

“You see your duty quickly, citizen,” said Sideki. “You should do all this before this very day is gone. Make it the way you think best, and remove the plaque that is

there. Then you can dictate your own plaque to any of the symbouleutik posts, and it will be made and set in. ‘My composition is better than your composition,’ is the way most plaques read, and sometimes a scenery composer will add something humorous like ‘and my dog can whip your dog.’ You can order all necessary materials from the same post there, and most citizens prefer to do the work with their own hands. This system works for gradual improvement. There are many Consensus Masterpieces that remain year after year; and the ordinary work is subject to constant turnover. There, for instance, is a tree which was not there this morning and which should not be there tonight. I'm sure that one of you can design a better tree.”

“I can,” said Miss Holly, “and I will do so today.” We descended from the roof parklands in the lower streets of Camiroi City, and went to Archives.

“Have you thought of a new law yet?” Miss Dia asked when we were at Archives. “We don't expect brilliance from such new citizens, but we ask you not to be ridiculous.”

Our leader, Charles Chosky, drew himself up to full height and spoke:

“We promulgate a law that a permanent group be set up on Camiroi to oversee and devise regulations for all random and hasty citizens' groups with the aim of making them more responsible, and that a fullscale review of such groups be held yearly.”

“Got it?” Miss Dia called to an apparatus there in Archives.

“Got it,” said the device. It ground its entrails and coughed up the law, inscribed on bronze, and set it in a law niche.

“The echo is deafening,” said our Miss Holly, pretending to listen.

“Yes. What is the effect of what we have done?” I asked.

“Oh, the law is in effect,” said young Nautes. “It has been weighed and integrated into the corpus of laws. it is already considered in the instructions that the magistrate coming on duty in a short time (usually a citizen will serve as magistrate for one hour a month) must scan before he

takes his seat. Possibly in this session he will assess somebody guilty of a misdemeanor to think about this problem for ten minutes and then to attach an enabling act to your law.”

“But what if some citizens’ group passes a silly law?” our Miss Holly asked.

“They do it often. One of them has just done so. But it will be repealed quickly enough,” said Miss Dia of the Camiroi. “Any citizen who has his name on three laws deemed silly by general consensus shall lose his citizenship for one year. A citizen who so loses his citizenship twice shall be mutilated, and the third time he shall be killed. This isn’t an extreme ruling. By that time he would have participated in nine silly laws. Surely that’s enough.”

“But, in the meantime, the silly laws remain in effect?” our Mr. Chosky asked.

“Not likely,” said Sideki. “A law is repealed thus: any citizen may go to Archives and remove any law, leaving the statement that he has abolished the law for his own reasons. He is then required to keep the voided law in his own home for three days. Sometimes the citizen or citizens who first passed the law will go to the house of the abolitionist. Occasionally they will fight to the death with ritual swords, but most often they will; parley. They may agree to have the law abolished. They may agree to restore the law. Or they may together work out a new law that takes into account the objections to the old.”

“Then every Camiroi law is subject to random challenge?” Chosky asked.

“Not exactly,” said Miss Dia. “A law which has stood unchallenged and unappealed for nine years becomes privileged. A citizen wishing to abolish such a law by removal must leave in its place not only his declaration of removal but also three fingers of his right hand as earnest of his seriousness in the matter. But a magistrate or a citizen going to reconstitute the law has to contribute only one of his fingers to the parley.”

“This seems to me to favor the establishment,” I said.

“We have none,” said Sideki. “I know that is hard on Earthlings to understand.”

“But is there no senate or legislative body on Camiroi, or even a president?” Miss Holly asked.

“Yes, there’s a president,” said Miss Dia, “and he is actually a dictator or tyrant. He is chosen by lot for a term of one week. Any of you could be chosen for the term starting tomorrow, but the odds are against it. We do not have a permanent senate, but often there are hasty senates constituted, and they have full powers.”

“Such bodies having full powers is what we want to study,” I said. “When will the next one be constituted and how will it act?”

“So, constitute yourselves one now and see how you act,” said young Nautes. “You simply say, ‘We constitute ourselves a Hasty Senate or Camiroi with full powers. Register yourselves at the nearest symnbouleutic post, and study your senate introspectively.’”

“Could we fire the president-dictator?” Miss Holly asked.

“Certainly,” said Sideki, “but a new president would immediately be chosen by lot; and your senate would not carry over to the new term, nor could any of you three partake of a new senate until a full presidential term had passed. But I wouldn’t, if I were you, form a senate to fire the present president. He is very good with the ritual sword.”

“Then citizens do actually fight with them yet?” Mr. Chosky asked.

“Yes, any private citizen may at any time challenge any other private citizen for any reason, or for none. Sometimes, but not often, they fight to the death, and they may not be interfered with. We call these decisions the Court of Last Resort.”

Reason says that the legal system on Camiroi cannot be as simple as this, and yet it seems to be. Starting with the thesis that every citizen of Camiroi should be able to handle every assignment or job on Camiroi, these people have cut organization to the minimum. These things we consider fluid or liberal about the legal system of Camiroi. Hereafter, whenever I am tempted to think of some law or custom of Earth as liberal, I will pause. I will hear Camiroi laughing.

On the other hand, there are these things which I consider adamant or conservative about the laws of Camiroi:

No assembly on Camiroi for purposes of entertainment may exceed thirty-nine persons. No more than this number may witness any spectacle or drama, or hear a musical presentation, or watch a sporting event. This is to prevent the citizens from becoming mere spectators rather than originators or partakers. Similarly, no writing — other than certain rare official promulgations — may be issued in more than thirty-

nine copies in one month. This, it seems to us, is a conservative ruling to prevent popular enthusiasms.

A father of a family who twice in five years appeals to specialists for such things as simple surgery for members of his household, or legal or financial or medical advice, or any such things as he himself should be capable of doing, shall lose his citizenship. It seems to us that this ruling obstructs the Camiroi from the full fruits of progress and research. They say, however, that it compels every citizen to become an expert in everything.

Any citizen who pleads incapacity when chosen by lot to head a military operation or a scientific project or a trade combine shall lose his citizenship and suffer mutilation. But one who assumes such responsibility, and then fails in the accomplishment of the task, shall suffer the loss and the mutilation only for two such failures.

Both cases seem to us to constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

Any citizen chosen by lot to provide a basic invention or display a certain ingenuity when there is corporate need for it, and who fails to provide such invention, shall be placed in such a position that he will lose his life unless he displays even greater ingenuity and invention than was originally called for.

This seems to us to be unspeakably cruel.

There is an absolute death penalty for impiety. But the question of what constitutes impiety, we received a startling answer:

“If you have to ask what it is, then you are guilty of it. For piety is comprehension of the basic norms. Lack of awareness of the special Camiroi context is the greatest impiety of all. Beware, new citizens! Should a person more upright and less indulgent than myself have heard your question, you might be executed before nightrise.”

The Camiroi, however, are straight-faced kidders. We do not believe that we were in any danger of execution, but we had been told bluntly not to ask questions of a certain sort.

**CONCLUSION:** Inconclusive. We are not yet able to understand the true legal system of Camiroi, but we have begun to acquire the viewpoint from which it may be studied. We recommend continuing study by a permanent resident team in this field.

— Paul Piggott, Political Analyst

From the journey book of Charles Chosky, chief of field group:

The basis of Camiroi polity and procedure is that any Camiroi citizen should be capable of filing any job on or pertaining to the planet. If it is ever the case that even one citizen should prove incapable of this, they say, then their system has already failed.

“Of course, it fails many times every day,” one of their men explained to me’ “But it does not fail completely. It is like a man in motion. He is falling off-balance at every step, but he saves himself, and so he strides. Our polity is always in motion. Should it come to rest, it would die.”

“Have the Camiroi a religion?” I asked citizen after citizen of them.

“I think so,” one of them said finally. “I believe that we do have that, and nothing else. The difficulty is in the word. Your Earth English word may come from religionem or from relegionem; it may mean a legality, or it may mean a revelation. I believe it is a mixture of the two concepts; with us it is, Of course we have a religion. What else is there to have?”

“Could you draw a parallel between Camiroi and Earth religion?” I asked him.

“No, I couldn’t,” he said bluntly. “I’m not being rude. I just don’t know how.”

But another intelligent Camiroi gave me some idea on it.

“The closest I could come to explaining the difference,” he said, “is by a legend that is told (as our Camiroi phrase has it) with the tongue so far in the cheek that it comes out the vulgar body aperture.”

“What is the legend?” I asked him.

“The legend is that men (or whatever local creatures) were tested on all the worlds. On some of the worlds men persevered in grace. These have become the transcendent worlds, asserting themselves as stars rather planets and swallowing their own suns, becoming incandescent in their merged persons living in grace and light. The more developed of them are those closed bodies which we know only by inference, so powerful and contained that they let no light or gravity or other emission escape them. They become of themselves closed and total universes, of their own space and outside of what we call space, perfect in their merged mentality and spirit.

“Then there are the worlds like Earth where men did fall from grace. On these worlds, each person contains an interior abyss and is capable both of great heights and depths. By our legend, the persons of these worlds, after their fall, were condemned to live for thirty thousand

generations in the bodies of animals and were then permitted to begin their slow and frustrating ascent back to remembered personhood.

“But the case of Camiroi was otherwise. We do not know whether there are further worlds of our like case. The primordial test-people of Camiroi did not fall. And they did not persevere. They hesitated. They could not make up their minds. They thought the matter over, and then they thought it over some more. Camiroi was therefore doomed to think matters over forever.

“So we are the equivocal people, capable of curious and continuing thought. But we have a hunger both for the depths and the heights which we have missed. To be sure, our Golden Mediocrity, our serene plateau, is higher than the heights of most worlds, higher than those of Earth, I believe. But it has not the exhilaration of height.”

“But you do not believe in legends,” I said.

“A legend is the highest scientific statement when it is the only statement available,” the Camiroi said. “We are the people who live according to reason. It makes a good life, but it lacks salt. You people have a literature of Utopias. You value their ideals highly, and they do have some effect on you. Yet you must feel that they have this quality of the insipid. And according to Earth standards, we are a Utopia. We are a world of the third case.

“We miss a lot. The enjoyment of poverty is generally denied to us. We have a certain hunger for incompetence, which is why some Earth things find a welcome here: bad Earth music, bad Earth painting and sculpture and drama, for instance. The good we can produce ourselves. The bad we are incapable of, and must import. Some of us believe that we need it in our diet.”

“If this is true, your position seems enviable to me,” I said.

“Yours isn’t,” he said, “and yet you are the most complete. You have both halves, and you have your numbers. We know, of course, that the Giver has never given a life anywhere until there was real need for it, and that everything born or created has its individual part to play. But we wish the Giver would be more generous to us in this, and it is in this particularly that we envy Earth.

“A difficulty with us is that we do our great deeds at too young an age and on distant worlds. We are all of us more or less retired by the age of twenty-five, and we have all had careers such as you would not believe.



We come home then to live maturely on our mature world. It's perfect, of course, but of a perfection too small. We have everything — except the one thing that matters, for which we cannot even find a name.”

I talked to many of the intelligent Camiroi on our short stay there. It was often difficult to tell whether they were talking seriously or whether they were mocking me. We do not as yet understand the Camiroi at all. Further study is recommended.

— Charles Chosky

Chief of Field Group

From the ephemeris of Holly HoIm, anthropologist and schedonahthropologist:

The word Camiroi is plural in form, is used for the people in both the single and plural and for the planet itself.

The civilization of Camiroi is more mechanical and more scientific than that of Earth, but it is more disguised. Their ideal machine shall have no moving parts at all, shall be noiseless and shall not look like a machine. For this reason, there is something pastoral about even the most thickly populated districts of Camiroi City.

The Camiroi are fortunate in the natural furnishings of their planet. The scenery of Camiroi conforms to the dictate that all repetition is tedious, for there is only one of each thing on that world. There is one major continent and one minor continent of quite different character; one fine cluster of islands of which the individual isles are of very different style; one great continental river with its seven branches flowing out of seven sorts of land; one complex of volcanoes; one great range of mountains; one titanic waterfall with her three so different daughters nearby; one inland sea, one gulf, one beach which is a three hundred and fifty mile crescent passing through seven phases named for the colors of iris; one great rain forest, one palm grove, one leaf-fall grove, one of evergreens and one of eodendrons; one grain bowl, one fruit bowl, one pampas; one parkland; one desert, one great oasis; and Camiroi City is the one great city. And all these places are unexcelled if their kind.

There are no ordinary places on Camiroi!

Travel being rapid, a comparatively poor young couple may go from anywhere on the planet to Green Beach, for instance, to take their evening meal, in less time than the consumption of the meal will take them, and for less money than that reasonable meal will cost. This easy

and frequent travel makes the whole world one community.

The Camiroi believe in the necessity of the frontier. They control many primitive worlds, and I gather hints that they are sometimes cruel in their management. The tyrants and proconsuls of these worlds are young, usually still in their teens. The young people are to have their careers and make their mistakes while in the foreign service. When they return to Camiroi they are supposed to be settled and of tested intelligence. The earning scale of the Camiroi is curious. A job of mechanical drudgery pays higher than one of intellectual Interest and involvement. This often means that the least intelligent and least able of the Camiroi will have more wealth than those of more ability. "This is fair," the Camiroi tell us. "Those not able to receive the higher recompense are certainly entitled to the lower." They regard the Earth system as grossly unequal, that a man should have both a superior job and superior pay, and that another man should have the inferior of both.

Though official offices and jobs are usually filled by lot, yet persons can apply for them for their own reasons. In special conditions there might even be competition for an assignment, such as directorship of trade posts where persons (for private reasons) might wish to acquire great fortunes rapidly. We witnessed confrontations between candidates in several of these campaigns, and they were curious.

"My opponent is a three and seven," said one candidate, and then he sat down.

"My opponent is a five and nine," said the other candidate. The small crowd clapped, and that was the confrontation or debate.

We attended another such rally.

"My opponent is an eight and ten," one candidate said briskly.

"My opponent is a two and six," said the other, and they went off together.

We did not understand this, and we attended a third confrontation. There seemed to be a little wave of excitement about to break here.

"My opponent is an old number four," said one candidate with a voice charged with emotion, and there was a gasp from the small crowd.

"I will not answer the charge," said the other candidate shaking with anger. "The blow is too foul, and we had been friends."

We found the key then. The Camiroi are experts at defamation, but they have developed a shorthand system to save time. They have their

decatalogue of slander, and the numbers refer to this. In its accepted version it runs as follows:

My opponent (1) is personally moronic. (2) is sexually incompetent. (3) flubs third points in Chuki game. (4) eats Mu seeds before the time of the summer solstice. (5) is physically pathetic. (7) is financially stupid. (8) is ethically weird. (9) is intellectually contemptible. (10) is morally dishonest.

Try it yourself, on your friends or your enemies! Works wonderfully. We recommend the listing and use to Earth politicians, except for numbers three and four which seem to have no meaning in Earth context.

The Camiroi have a corpus of proverbs. We came on them in Archives, along with an attached machine with a hundred levers on it. We depressed the lever marked Earth English, and had a sampling of these proverbs put into Earth context.

A man will not become rich by raising goats, the machine issued. Yes, that could almost pass for an Earth proverb. It almost seems to mean something..

Even buzzards sometimes gag. That has an Earth sound also.

It's that or pluck chickens.

"I don't believe I understand that one," I said.

"You think it's easy to put these in Earth context, try it sometime," the translation machine issued. "The proverb applies to distasteful but necessary tasks."

"Ah, well, let's try some more," said Paul Piggott. "That one."

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, the machine issued abruptly.

"But that is an Earth proverb word for word," I said.

"You wait until I finish it, lady," the translation machine growled. "To this proverb in its classical form is always appended a cartoon showing a bird fluttering away and a man angrily wiping his hand with some disposable material while he says, "A bird in the hand is not worth two in the bush."

"Are we being had by a machine?" our Charles Chosky asked softly.

"Give us that proverb there," I pointed one out to the machine.

There'll be many a dry eye here when you leave, the machine issued.

We left.

“I may be in serious trouble,” I said to a Camiroi lady of my acquaintance, “Well, aren’t you going to ask me what it is?”

“No, I don’t particularly care,” she said. “But tell me if you feel an absolute compulsion to it.”

“I never heard of such a thing,” I said. “I have been chosen by lot to head a military expedition for the relief of a trapped force on a world I never heard of. I am supposed to raise and supply this force (out of my private funds, it says here) and have it in flight within eight oodles. That’s only two hours. What will I do?”

“Do it, of course, Miss Holly,” the lady said. “You are a citizen of Camiroi now, and you should be proud to take charge of such an operation.”

“But I don’t know how! What will happen if I just tell them that I don’t know how?”

“Oh, you’ll lose your citizenship and suffer mutilation. That’s the law, you know.”

“How will they mutilate me?”

“Probably cut off your nose. I wouldn’t worry about it. It doesn’t do much for you anyhow.”

“But we have to go back to Earth! We are going to go tomorrow, but now we want to go today. I do anyhow.”

“Earth kid, if I were you, I’d get out to Sky-Port awful fast.”

By a coincidence (I hope it was no more than that) our political analyst, Paul Piggott, had been chosen by lot to make a survey (personally, minutely and interiorly, the directive said) of the sewer system of Camiroi City. And our leader, Charles Chosky, had been selected by lot to put down a rebellion of Groll’s Trolls on one of the worlds, and to leave his right hand and his right eye as surety for the accomplishment of the mission.

We were rather nervous as we waited for Earth Flight at Sky-Port, particularly so when a group of Camiroi acquaintances approached us. But they did not stop us. They said goodbye to us without too much enthusiasm.

“Our visit has been all too short,” I said hopefully.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” one of them rejoined. “There is a Camiroi proverb —”

“We’ve heard it,” said our leader, Charles Chosky. “We also are dry-

eyed about leaving.”

**FINAL RECOMMENDATION:** That another and broader field group be sent to study the Camiroi in greater detail. That a special study might fruitfully be made of the humor of the Camiroi. That no members of the first field group should serve on the second field group.

— Holly Holm

## GINNY WRAPPED IN THE SUN

“I’m going to read my paper tonight, Dismas” Dr. Minden said, “and they’ll hoot me out of the hall. The thought of it almost makes the hair walk off my head.”

“Oh well, serves you right, Minden. From the hints you’ve given me of it, you can’t expect easy acceptance for the paper; but the gentlemen aren’t so bad.”

“Not bad? Hauser honks like a gander! That clattering laugh of Coldbeater! Snodden sniggers so loud that it echoes! Cooper’s boom is like barrels rolling downstairs, and your own — it’ll shrivel me, Dismas. Imagine the weirdest cacophony ever — Oh no! I wasn’t thinking of one so weird as that!”

Musical screaming! Glorious gibbering with an under-tone that could shatter rocks! Hooting of a resonance plainly too deep for so small an instrument! Yowling, hoodoo laughing, broken roaring, rhinoceros runting! And the child came tumbling out of the tall rocks of Doolen’s Mountain, leaping down the flanks of the hill as though she was a waterfall. And both the men laughed

“Your Ginny is the weirdest cacophony I can imagine, Dismas,” Dr. Minden said. “It scares me, and I love it. Your daughter is the most remarkable creature in the world.

“Talk to us, Ginny! I wish I could fix it that you would be four years old forever.”

“Oh, I’ve fixed it myself, Dr. Minden,” Ginny sang as she came to them with a movement that had something of the breathless grace of a gazelle and something of the scuttering of a little wild pig. “I use a trick like the hoodoo woman did. She ate water-puppy eggs. She never got any older, you know.”

“What happened to her, Gin?” Dr. Minden asked Ginny Dismas.

“Oh, after a while she got gray-headed and wrinkled. And after another while her teeth and hair fell out, and then she died. But she never did get any older. She had everybody fooled. I got everybody fooled too.”

“I know that you have, Ginny, in very many ways. Well, have you eaten water-puppy eggs to get no older?”

“No. I can’t find out where they lay them, Dr. Minden. I’ve got my own trick that’s even better.”

“Do you know, Ginny, that when you really cut loose you are the loudest little girl in the world?”

“I know it. I won it yesterday. Susanna Shonk said that she was the loudest. We hollered for an hour. Susanna’s home with a sore throat today, but there isn’t anything the matter with me. Hey, has that house ever been there before?”

“That house? But it’s our own house, Ginny,” her father, Dr. Dismas, said softly. “You’ve lived in it all your life. You’re in and out of it a thousand times a day.”

“I never saw it before,” Ginny said. “I better go see what it looks like on the inside.” And Ginny hurtled into the house that she was in and out of a thousand times a day.

“I’ll tell you a secret, Dismas,” Dr. Minden said. “Your small daughter Ginny is not really beautiful.”

“Everybody thinks that she is, Minden.”

“I know. They all believe her the most beautiful child in the world. So did I till a moment ago. So will I again in minute when I see her come out of the house. But her contemporary, my small son Krios, told me how to look at her; and I do so. For an instant, out of her incessant movement, I forced myself to see her as stopped cold, at rest. She is grotesque, Dismas. If ever she pauses, she is grotesque.”

“No, she is like ultimate matter. Existence and motion are the same thing for her, and there cannot be the one without the other. But I’ve never seen her stopped, even in sleep. She’s the liveliest sleeper anyone ever watched — a laughing and singing sleeper. Her mother calls her our beautiful goblin.”

“Exactly, she’s a goblin, a monkey, a kobald. She’s even grown a little pot like one of them. Dismas, she has a monkey face and bandy legs and a goblin’s own pot.”

“No, she hasn’t! There she goes! Out of the house and up into the rocks again, and she’s so beautiful that it shakes me. Four years old — and she can still look at the world and say, ‘Funny I never saw you before!’ Yes, I’ve got a multidimensional daughter, Minden. Also a neighbor who is either deep or murky. You keep feeding me snatches of that paper of yours so I suppose that you want to excite my curiosity about it. And the title — The Contingent Mutation. What is? Who is?”

“We are, Dismas. We are contingent, conditional, temporary,

makeshift and improbable in our species. Mine is a paper badly conceived and badly put together, and I shiver at the reception that it will get. But it is about man, who is also badly conceived and badly put together. The proposition of my paper is that man is descended, recently and by incredible mutation, from the most impossible of ancestors, Xauenanthropus or Xauen Man. The answer of that descent scares me.”

“Minden, are you out of your mind? Where is the descent? Where is the mutation? The Xauens were already men. No descent and no mutation was required. The finds are all fifteen years old. One look at Xauen, and everybody saw instantly that the Neanderthals and Grimaldi and Cro-Magnon were all close cousins of the same species — ourselves. They were the template, the master key. They unriddled every riddle. We saw why the chin or lack of chin was only a racial characteristic. We saw it all. There is nothing to distinguish the Xauens from ourselves except that their adults were badly made ganglers, and probably unhealthy. The Xauens are modern men. They are ourselves. There is nothing revolutionary about stuttering out fifteen-year-old certainties, Minden. I thought your paper was to be a giant stride. But it is only stepping off a two-inch curb.”

“Yes, an abysmal step off a two-inch curb, Dismas, backward and around the world, and standing on one’s head and turning into a howling monkey in the process. It isn’t a simple step. If I am correct, Dismas, then our descent from the Xauens was by an incredible, sudden and single mutation; one that has been misunderstood both as to effect and direction.”

“I’ve never been quite satisfied with the Xauens myself. There is something misshapen about the whole business. Of course we know the Xauens only by the skeletons of ninety-six children, three adolescents, and two adults. We are bound to find more.”

“If we do, we will find them in the same proportion. Oh, we will not recognize them at all. But does it not seem an odd proportion to you? How come there were so many kids? And how come — think about this a long, long time, will you? — that eighty-six of those kids were of the some size and apparently of the same age? The Xauen skeletons came out of nine digs, close together both in location and age. And of the total of one hundred and one skeletons, eighty-six of them are of four-year-old kids, Sure the Xauens are modern man! Sure they are ourselves chin to chin.



But eighty-six four-year-old kids out of a hundred and one people is not a modern proportion.”

“You explain it then, Minden. I suppose that your paper attempts to. Oh, scatter-boned ancestors! Here come the religious nuts!”

Drs. Dismas and Minden had been sitting in the open parkland in campesino chairs, in their own fine neighborhood between Doolen’s Mountain and the lower brushland. Dr. Dismas drew a hog-nosed pistol from under his arm at the sight of the nuts who had shuffled up that way several times before.

“Be off!” Dismas barked as the nuts crowded and shuffled up closer from the lower brushland. “There’s nothing around here you want. You’ve been here a dozen times with your silly questions.

“No, only three times,” the nut leader said. He was clean-shaven and short-haired in the old manner still affected by fanatics, and he had fool written in every line of him. “It’s a simple thing we seek,” the leader sniffled. “We only want to find the woman and kill her. I believe that you could help us find the woman.”

“There is no woman here except my wife!” Dr. Dismas said angrily. “You have said yourselves that she isn’t the woman. Be gone now, and don’t come back here again.”

“But everything that we know tells us that the woman is somewhere near this place,” the nut leader insisted. “She is the woman who will bear the weird seed.”

“Oh, well, there are some who say that my daughter Ginny is a weird seed. Be off now.”

“We know Ginny. She comes down sometimes to mock us. Ginny is not the seed, but there is something of it about her. Ginny is born and already four years old. The seed that we are seeking to kill is still in the womb. Are you sure that your wife —”

“Damn it, do you want a public pregnancy test? No, my wife is not!”

Dr. Dismas shot a couple of times around the feet of the nut leader, and the whole gaggle of the nuts shuffled off again. “It is only a little thing we seek, to find and kill the woman,” they sniffled as they went.

“They may be right, Dismas,” Dr. Minden said. “I’ve been expecting the weird seed myself. I believe that it may already have appeared several times, and such nuts have killed it several times. The contingent mutation can come unhinged at any time. It always could. And when it does, the

human world can well pass away. But this time they won't be able to find the woman to kill her."

"This is fishier than Edward's Ichthyology, as we used to say in school. I begin to understand why you're afraid of the reception that your paper might get. And you, as well as I, seem to have developed a little weird seed lately."

"Yes, my young and my older son are both acting most peculiar lately, particularly in their relation to the Dismas family. My son Dall has been jilted by your daughter Agar, or is it the other way around? Or have they both been jilted by your small daughter Ginny? As far as I can arrive at it, Ginny told them that that sort of stuff is out, no longer necessary, not even wanted on their parts. She is obsoleting them, she says.

"And my four-year-old son Krios is about out of his mind over your Ginny. He is so advanced in some ways and so retarded in others. It seems as though he grew unevenly and then stopped growing. I worry about him."

"Yes. Ginny has acquired several more small boyfriends now. She says that you break the fort with a big ram and you break the ram at the same time and throw it away. And then you find better tools to take it over. I don't know what she's talking about. But Krios is jealous as only a passionate four-year-old can be."

"Krios says that Ginny is bad and she made him bad. He says that he doesn't know the words for the way they were bad, but that he will go to Hell for it."

"I had no idea that children were still taught about Hell."

"They aren't. But they have either intuitive knowledge of the place, or a continuing childhood folk legend of it. Oh, here comes bad Ginny and her mother, and they both have that stubborn look on them. You have two strong women in your house, at least. I wish that Agar were; for my son Dall isn't, and one of them should be."

Ginny and her mother Sally came hand in hand with the air of something needing to be settled.

"I want to be fair about this, Father," Ginny called solidly. "What I like about me is that I am always so fair."

"That's also what I like about you, Ginny," said Dr. Dismas, "and what is the argument?"

"All I asked of Mother is that she make me three thousand seven

hundred and eighty peanut butter sandwiches. Isn't that a fair request?"

"I'm not sure that it is, Ginny," Dr. Dismas said. "It would take you a long time to eat that many."

"Of course it will, twelve hundred and sixty days. But that makes only three a day for the time I have to stay hidden in my nest up in the rocks. I figured that out by myself without paper. A lot of kids that have been to school already can't figure as well as I can."

"I know. A precocious daughter is a mixed blessing," her father said.

"Oh, Ginny, you're going to get a paddling," her mother said. "I made you three of them, and you said that you weren't even hungry for them."

"Father, who is this woman who talks to me so brusquely?" Ginny demanded.

"She is your mother, Ginny. You have been with her every day of your life and before. You have just come out of the house with her, and you still stand hand in hand with her."

"Funny I never saw her before," Ginny said. "I don't believe that this woman is my mother at all. Well, I will get my servants to make the sandwiches for me. Serpents kill you, woman! — Oh, no, no, nobody touches me like that!"

Musical screaming! Wailing of a resonance too deep for so small an instrument, as Ginny was dragged off by her mother to get paddled. Howling to high Heaven, and the plainting of wild hogs and damned goblins!

"She is in good voice," Dr. Minden said. "When she speaks of her servants, she means your daughter Agar and my son Dall. It scares me, for I almost know what she means. It is eerie that two compatible young people say they will not marry because a four-year-old child forbids them to do it. It scares me still more when I begin to understand the mechanism at work."

"What is the mechanism, Minden?"

"The mutational inhibitions. It's quite a tangled affair. Do you remember the Screaming Monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia twenty years ago?"

"Vague1y. Bothersome little destructive monkeys that had to be hunted down and killed — hunted down by a sort of religious crusade, as I remember it. Yes, a mutation I suppose. A sudden wildness appearing in a species. What is the connection?"

“Dismas, they were the first, the initial probe that failed. Others are on the way, and one of them will no fail. The story is that the religious crusaders said that no human child could be born while the howling monkeys flourished, for the monkeys themselves were human children. Well, they were. Well, no they weren’t children. And they weren’t human. But, in a way, they had been both. Or at least —”

“Minden, do you know what you do mean?”

“I hardly do, Dismas. Here come the ‘servants.’”

Dall Minden and Agar Dismas drove up in a little roustabout car and stopped.

“What is this nonsense I hear that you two are not going to get married?” Dr. Dismas demanded.

“Not unless Ginny changes her mind, Father,” Agar said. “Oh, don’t ask us to explain it. We don’t understand it either.”

“You are a pair of damned useless drones,” Dismas growled.

“Don’t say that, Dismas,” Dr. Minden gasped. “Everything begins to scare me now. ‘Drones’ has a technical meaning in this case.”

“Ginny has just suffered an ignominy past bearing,” Agar grinned. She was a nice pleasant girl. “Now she’s sulking in her cave up in Doolen’s Mountain and has sent word for us to come at once.”

“How has she sent word?” Dr. Dismas demanded. “You two have just driven up.”

“Oh, don’t ask us to explain, Father. She sends us word when she wants us. We don’t understand it either. Well go up on foot.”

“Where is all this going to end?” Dr. Dismas asked when the two grinning young drones had left them and were ambling up the mountain.

“I don’t know, Dismas,” Minden told him. “But I believe it may as well begin with a verse:

Salamanders do it,  
Tadpoles and newts do it.  
Why can’t me and you do it?

“It’s a verse that the four-year-olds have been chanting, and you may not be tuned in on them. And the peculiar thing is that the salamanders and newts and tadpoles are doing it now, more than ever before. It’s worldwide. See Higgleton’s recent paper if you don’t take my word for it.”

“Oh, great blithering biologists! What are the squigglers doing more

than ever before?”

“Engaging in neotic reproduction, of course. In many pocket areas, tadpoles have been reproducing as tadpoles for several years now, and the adult frog species is disappearing. There have always been cases of it, of course, but now it is becoming a pattern. The same is true of the newts and salamanders. And remember that all three are like man, contingent mutations. But how do the four-year-old children know about it when it is still one of the best-kept secrets of the biologists?... Here comes my wife. Is it more family trouble, Clarinda?”

“Oh, Krios has locked himself in the bathroom, and he won’t come out or answer. He’s been acting abominable all morning. Have you that emergency key you made?”

“Here. Now get the boy out, whip him gently but painfully. then explain to him that we love him very much and that his troubles are our troubles. Then get dinner. This family here never eats, unless it is peanut butter sandwiches, and has not thought to ask me to dine with them. Get back next door and with it, Clarinda. and stop bubbling.”

“There is something really bothering Krios,” Clarinda Minden bubbled yet, but she got herself back next door,

“Where shall we take it up, Dismas?” Doctor Minden asked. “With the howling monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia who may once have been human children? But nobody believes that. With the neotic salamanders and newts and pollywogs? With the Xauens who were either our grandparents or our grandchildren? Or with ourselves?”

“Roost on the Xauens a while,” Dr. Dismas said. “You didn’t quite finish your screed on them.”

“Humans descend from the Xauens. Australopithecus, no. Sinanthropus, no. They were creatures of another line. But Neanderthal, Cro-Magnon, Grimaldi and ourselves are all of one species, and we descend from the Xauens. It is not true, however, that we have only one hundred and one skeletons of the Xauens. We have more than twenty thousand of them, but most of them are called ouezzane monkeys.”

“Minden, you’re crazy.”

“I am talking about the three-foot-tall, big-headed running monkeys who were mature and full grown at four years of age and very old at fourteen. They threw a few sports, steers and freemartins, who passed the puberty age without effect and continued to grow. They were gangling

drones, servants of the active species, and of course sterile. They were the one in one hundred occurrence and of no importance. And one day they bred, set up a mutational inhibition against the normal; and mankind — the privileged mutation — was born.

“The Onezzane monkeys, of whom the Xauens were the transitional state, were the same as the howling monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia — going in the other direction. They had no speech, they had no fire, and they made no tools. Then one morning they were the Xauens, and the next morning they were humans. They passed all the highly developed apes in an instant. They were the privileged mutation, which is not, I believe, permanent.

“Dismas, the one hundred and one recognized Xauen skeletons that we possess are not of ninety-six children (eighty-six of them apparent four-year-olds), three adolescents and two adults. They are of ten infants and children, eighty-six adults, two mutants and three filial-twos.

“Let’s take it from the flank. A few years ago, a biologist amused himself by making a table of heartbeat life lengths. All the mammals but one, he found, live about the same number of heartbeats, the longer-living species having correspondingly slower heartbeats. But one species, man, lives four or five times as long as he should by this criterion. I forget whether the biologist implied that this makes man a contingent species living on borrowed time. I do imply it. In any case, since the biologist was also involved in science fiction, his implications were not taken seriously.

“From the other flank. Even before Freud there were studies made of false puberty, the sudden hot interest and activity that appears about age four and then goes away for another ten years. It’s been many times guessed that back in our ancestry our true puberty was at such an early age.”

“Minden, no species can change noticeably in less than fifty thousand years.”

“Dismas, it can change in between three and nine months, depending on the direction traveled. Here they come back! Well, drones, did you settle Ginny down? Where are you going now?”

Agar Dismas and Dall Minden had sauntered down from Doolen’s Mountain.

“We’re going to get four hundred and seventy-three loaves of bread and four hundred and seventy-three jars of peanut butter,” Agar said

rather nervously.

“Yes, Ginny says to use Crispy-Crusty bread,” Dall Minden detailed. “She says it has sixteen slices to a loaf, so we can make eight sandwiches to a loaf and to a jar. There will be four sandwiches left over, and Ginny says we can have them for our work. She’s going to stay in her cave for twelve hundred and sixty days. She says it will take that long to get her thing going good so nobody can bust it up. I think she’s a numerologist at heart. This is going to take more than four hundred dollars. That’s more than Agar and myself have saved up together. Ginny says to do it, though, even if we have to steal the money for it. And she says to be quick about it.”

“Here come the religious nuts again,” Doctor Dismas said. “I may have to kill one of the fools if they keep coming back.”

“They won’t come here this time,” Agar said. “They’ll prowl Doolen’s Mountain from now on. They know it’ll be there. But I don’t think they’ll kill Ginny. They don’t understand what she is. They didn’t understand the first time either; they didn’t guess that it could possibly be one of the big ones. We are all hoping that they will kill me and be satisfied and think that they have done it. They will find me there where they think the woman should be, and that may fool them. Well, tootle! We have to hurry with everything or Ginny will be angry.”

“No species can count itself secure that has not endured for ten million years,” said Dr. Minden. “We still hear that old saying that evolution is irreversible. Hogwash! I have myself studied seven species of hogs washed away before one endured. The human race is so new that it has no stability. The majority of species do not survive, and we have lived only one tenth of the span that would tilt the odds for survival in our favor. Even the species that finally survive will commonly revert several times before acquiring stability. We could revert at any time.”

“Revert to what?”

“To what we were, to what we still are basically, little three-foot-high, big-headed, howling monkeys, without tools, and with only a fifth of our present life span.”

“Reversions are like cosmic disasters, Minden. They take a few thousand years to happen, and by that time we’ll be gone.”

“No, this can happen instantly, Dismas, by a single neotic conception. And then it becomes the norm by the mechanics of mutational inhibition.

The reversion will inhibit the old normal. We have already seen that inhibition at work.”

The very stones crying out like demented rooks! Bushes barking like coyotes! Green-colored yowling, and laughter that sang like a band-saw. And Ginny was in the middle of them again.

She was the howlingest kid ever pupped.

“I don’t think that I will talk any more after today, Father,” she said solemnly after she had cut off her other noises. “I think I’ll just forget how. I’ll just holler and hoot and cary on. That’s more fun anyhow.

“Why aren’t my servants back with my provisions? They’ve had almost time to get back if they did everything at breakneck speed and had good luck. They might have had to go to more than one place to get that much bread and peanut butter, though. I doubt if I’ll eat it. I just want to have it if I need it, and I wanted to teach them obedience. I’ll probably start to eat meadow mice and ground squirrels tomorrow.

“Here comes Mrs. Minden crying over that Krios. What’s the good of that?”

There was a keening. Clarinda was running and crying, and Sally Dismas had rushed out of the house and met her.

“Clarinda, what in the world has happened?” Dr. Minden cried, rushing to his tearful wife.

“Our baby Krios has killed himself.”

“I told him to,” said Ginny. “I’d gotten everything I wanted from him. I’ll find better ones for the other times.”

“Ginny!” Her mother was horrified. “I’ll whip —”

“Don’t punish the child, Sally,” Clarinda Minden said. “She’s beyond good and evil. Whatever was between her and my baby Krios, it’s better that I never know.”

“Did I say something wrong?” Ginny asked. “The last thing I ever say, and it should be wrong? Dr. Minden, you know about things like that. What are you creatures, anyhow?”

“People, Ginny,” Dr. Minden said miserably.

“Funny I never saw any of you before. I sure don’t intend to get involved with people.”

Raucous rowling! Hound-dog hooting! Hissing of badgers, and the clattering giggle of geese! Shag-tooth shouting and the roaring of baby bulls!



And a screaming monkey leaped and tumbled up the rocks like crazy water.

## CAMELS AND DROMEDARIES, CLEM

“Greeks and Armenians, Clem. Condors and buzzards.”

“Samoyeds and Malemites, Clem. Galena and molybdenite.”

Oh here, here! What kind of talk is that?

That is definitive talk. That is fundamental talk. There is no other kind of talk that will bring us to the core of this thing.

Clem Clendenning was a traveling salesman, a good one. He had cleared \$35,000 the previous year. Lie worked for a factory in a midwestern town. The plant produced a unique product, and Clem sold it over one-third of the nation.

Things were going well with him. Then a little thing happened, and it changed his life completely.

Salesmen have devices by which they check and double-check. One thing they do when stopping at hotels in distant towns; they make sure they're registered. This sounds silly, but it isn't. A salesman will get calls from his home office and it is important that the office be able to locate him. Whenever Clem registered at a hotel he would check back after several hours to be sure that they had him entered correctly. He would call in from somewhere, and he would ask for himself. And it sometimes did happen that he was told he was not registered. At this Clem would always raise a great noise to be sure that they had him straight thereafter.

Arriving in a town this critical day, Clem had found himself ravenously hungry and tired to his depths. Both states were unusual to him. He went to a grill and ate gluttonously for an hour, so much so that people stared at him. He ate almost to the point of apoplexy. Then he taxied to the hotel, registered, and went up to his room at once. Later, not remembering whether he had even undressed or not (it was early afternoon), he threw himself onto the bed and slept, as it seemed, for hours.

But he noted that it was only a half hour later that he woke, feeling somehow deprived, as though having a great loss. He was floundering around altogether in a daze, and was once more possessed of an irrational hunger. He unpacked a little, put on a suit, and was surprised to find that it hung on him quite loosely.

He went out with the feeling that he had left something on the bed that was not quite right, and yet he had been afraid to look. He found a

heartly place and had another great meal. And then (at a different place so that people would not be puzzled at him) he had still another one. He was feeling better now, but mighty queer, mighty queer.

Fearing that he might be taken seriously ill, he decided to check his bearings. He used his old trick. He found a phone and called his hotel and asked for himself.

“We will check,” said the phone girl, and a little bit later she said, “Just a minute, he will be on the line in a minute.”

“Oh, great green goat,” he growled, “I wonder how they have me mixed up this time.”

And Clem was about to raise his voice unpleasantly to be sure that they got him straight, when a voice came onto the phone.

This is the critical point.

It was his own voice.

The calling Clem Denning laughed first. And then he froze. It was no trick. It was no freak. There was no doubt that it was his own voice. Clem used the dictaphone a lot and he knew the sound of his own voice.

And now he heard his own voice raised higher in all its unmistakable aspects, a great noise about open idiots who call on the phone and then stand silent without answering.

“It’s me all right,” Clem grumbled silently to himself. “I sure do talk rough when I’m irritated.”

There was a law against harassment by telephone, the voice on the phone said. By God, the voice on the phone said, he just noticed that his room had been rifled. He was having the call monitored right now, the voice on the phone swore. Clem knew that this was a lie, but he also recognized it as his own particular style of lying. The voice got really wooly and profane.

Then there was a change in the tone.

“Who are you?” the voice asked hollowly. “I hear you breathing scared. I know your sound. Gaaah — it’s me!” And the voice on the phone was also breathing scared.

“There has to be an answer,” he told himself. “I’ll just go to my room and take a hot bath and try to sleep it off.”

Then he roared back: “Go to my room! Am I crazy? I have just called my room. I am already there. I would not go to my room for one million one hundred and five thousand dollars.”

He was trembling as though his bones were too loose for his flesh. It was funny that he had never before noticed how bony he was. But he wasn't too scared to think straight on one subject, however crooked other things might be.

"No, I wouldn't go back to that room for any sum. But I will do something for another sum, and I'll do it damned quick."

He ran, and he hasn't stopped running yet. That he should have another self-made flesh terrified him. He ran, but he knew where he was running for the first stage of it. He took the night plane back to his hometown, leaving bag and baggage behind.

He was at the bank when it opened in the morning. He closed out all his accounts. He turned everything into cash. This took several hours. He walked out of there with \$83,000. He didn't feel like a thief; it was his own; it couldn't have belonged to his other self, could it? If there were two of them, then let there be two sets of accounts.

Now to get going fast.

He continued to feel odd. He weighed himself. In spite of his great eating lately, he had lost a hundred pounds. That's enough to make anyone feel odd. He went to New York City to lose himself in the crowd and to think about the matter.

And what was the reaction at his firm and at his home when he turned up missing? That's the second point. He didn't turn up missing. As the months went by he followed the doings of his other self. He saw his pictures in the trade papers; he was still with the same firm he was still top salesman. He always got the hometown paper, and he sometimes found himself therein. He saw his own picture with his wife Veronica. She looked wonderful and so, he had to admit, did he. They were still on the edge of the social stuff.

"If he's me, I wonder who I am?" Clem continued to ask himself. There didn't seem to be any answer to this. There wasn't any handle to take the thing by.

Clem went to an analyst and told his story. The analyst said that Clem had wanted to escape his job, or his wife Veronica, or both. Clem insisted that this was not so; he loved his job and his wife; he got deep and fulfilling satisfaction out of both.

"You don't know Veronica or you wouldn't suggest it," he told the analyst. "She is — ah — well, if you don't know her, then hell, you don't

know anything.”

The analyst told him that it had been his own id talking to him on the telephone.

“How is it that my id is doing a top selling job out of a town five hundred miles from here, and I am here?” Clem wanted to know. “Other men’s ids aren’t so talented.”

The analyst said that Clem was suffering from a *tmema* or *diaretikos* of an oddly named part of his psychic apparatus.

“Oh hell, I’m an extrovert. Things like that don’t happen to people like me,” Clem said.

Thereafter Clem tried to make the best of his compromised life. He was quickly well and back to normal weight. But he never talked on the telephone again in his life. He’d have died most literally if he ever heard his own voice like that again. He had no phone in any room where he lived. He wore a hearing aid which he did not need; he told people that he could not hear over the phone, and that any unlikely call that came for him would have to be taken down and relayed to him.

He had to keep an eye on his other self, so he did renew one old contact. With one firm in New York there was a man he had called on regularly; this man had a cheerful and open mind that would not be spooked by the unusual. Clem began to meet this man (Why should we lie about it? His name was Joe Zabotsky.) not at the firm; but at an after-hours place which he knew Joe frequented.

Joe heard Clem’s story and believed it — after he had phoned (in Clem’s presence) the other Clem, located him a thousand miles away, and ordered an additional month’s supply of the unique product which they didn’t really need, things being a little slow in all lines right then.

After that, Clem would get around to see Joe Zabotsky an average of once a month, about the time he figured the other Clem had just completed his monthly New York call.

“He’s changing a little bit, and so are you,” Joe told Clem one evening. “Yeah, it was with him just about like with you. He did lose a lot of weight a while back, what you call the critical day, and he gained it back pretty quick just like you did. It bugs me, Clem, which of you I used to know. There are some old things between us that he recalls and you don’t; there are some that you recall and he doesn’t; and dammit there are some you both recall, and they happened between myself and one man only, not

between myself and two men.

“But these last few months your face seems to be getting a little fuller, and his a little thinner. You still look just alike, but not quite as just-alike as you did at first.”

“I know it,” Clem said. “I study the analysts now since they don’t do any good at studying me, and I’ve learned an old analyst’s trick. I take an old face-on photo of myself, divide it down the center, and then complete each half with its mirror image. It gives two faces just a little bit different. Nobody has the two sides of his face quite alike. These two different faces are supposed to indicate two different aspects of the personality. I study myself, now, and I see that I am becoming more like one of the constructions; so he must be becoming more like the other construction. He mentions that there are disturbances between Veronica and himself, does he? And neither of them quite understands what is the matter? Neither do I.”

Clem lived modestly, but he began to drink more than he had. He watched, through his intermediary Joe and by other means, the doings of his other self. And he waited. This was the most peculiar deal he had ever met, but he hadn’t been foxed on very many deals.

“He’s no smarter than I am,” Clem insisted. “But, by cracky, if he’s me, he’s pretty smart at that. What would he do if he were in my place? And I guess, in a way, he is.”

Following his avocation of drinking and brooding and waiting, Clem frequented various little places, and one day he was in the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. This was owned and operated by Two-Face Terrel, a doubledealer and gentleman, even something of a dandy. A man had just seated himself at a dim table with Clem, had been served by Two-Face, and now the man began to talk.

“Why did Matthew have two donkeys?” the man asked.

“Matthew who?” Clem asked. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m talking about 21:1-9, of course,” the man said. “The other Gospels have only one donkey. Did you ever think about that?”

“No, I’d never given it a thought,” Clem said.

“Well, tell me then, why does Matthew have two demoniacs?”

“What?”

“8:28-34. The other evangelists have only one crazy man.”

“Maybe there was only one loony at first, and he drove the guy drinking next to him crazy.”

“That’s possible. Oh, you’re kidding. But why does Matthew have two blind men?”

“Number of a number, where does this happen?” Clem asked.

“9:27-31, and again 20:29-34. In each case the other gospels have only one blind man. Why does Matthew double so many things? There are other instances of it.”

“Maybe he needed glasses,” Clem said.

“No,” the man whispered, “I think he was one of us.”

“What ‘us’ are you talking about?” Clem asked. But already he had begun to suspect that his case was not unique. Suppose that it happened one time out of a million? There would still be several hundred such sundered persons in the country, and they would tend to congregate in such places as the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. And there was something deprived or riven about almost every person who came into the place.

And remember,” the man was continuing, “the name or cognomen of one of the other Apostles was ‘The Twin.’ But of whom was he twin? I think there was the beginning of a group of them there already.”

“He wants to see you,” Joe Zabotsky told Clem when they met several months later. “So does she.”

“When did he begin to suspect that there was another one of me?”

“He knew something was wrong from the first. A man doesn’t lose a hundred pounds in an instant without there being something wrong. And he knew something was very wrong when all his accounts were cleaned out. These were not forgeries, and he knew it. They were not as good as good forgeries, for they were hurried and all different and very nervous. But they were all genuine signatures, he admitted that. Damn, you are a curious fellow, Clem!”

“How much does Veronica know, and how? What does she want? What does he?”

“He says that she also began to guess from the first. ‘You act like you’re only half a man, Clem,’ she would say to him, to you, that is. She wants to see more of her husband, she says, the other half. And he wants to trade places with you, at least from time to time on a trial basis.”

“I won’t do it! Let him stew in it!” Then Clem called Clem a name so vile that it will not be given here.

“Take it easy, Clem,” Joe remonstrated. “It’s yourself you are calling that.”

There was a quizzical young-old man who came sometimes into the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. They caught each other’s eye this day, and the young-old began to talk.

“Is not consciousness the thing that divides man from the animals?” he asked. “But consciousness is a double thing, a seeing one’s self; not only a knowing, but a knowing that one knows. So the human person is of its essence double. How this is commonly worked out in practice, I don’t understand. Our present states are surely not the common thing.”

“My own consciousness isn’t intensified since my person is doubled,” Clem said. “It’s all the other way. My consciousness is weakened. I’ve become a creature of my own unconscious. There’s something about you that I don’t like, man.”

“The animal is simple and single,” the young-old man said “It lacks true reflexive consciousness. But man is dual (though I don’t understand the full meaning of it here) and he has at least intimations of true consciousness And what is the next step?”

I fathom you now,” Clem said. “My father would have called you a Judas Priest.”

I don’t quite call myself that. But what follows the singularity of the animal and duality of man? You recall the startling line of Chesterton? — ‘we trinitarians have known it is not good for God to be alone.’ But was His case the same as ours? Did He do a violent double take, or triple take, when He discovered one day that there were Three of Him? Has He ever adjusted to it? Is it possible that He can?”

“Aye, you’re a Judas Priest. I hate the species.”

But I am not, Mr. Clendenning. I don’t understand this sundering any more than you do. It happens only one time in a million, but it has happened to us. Perhaps it would happen to God but one time in a billion billion, hut it has happened. The God who is may be much rarer than any you can imagine.

“Let me explain: my other person is a very good man, much better than when we were conjoined. He’s a dean already, and he’ll be a bishop within five years. Whatever of doubt and skepticism that was in me originally is still in the me here present, and it is somehow intensified. I do not want to be dour or doubting. I do not want to speak mockingly of



the great things. But the bothering things are all in the me here. The other me is freed of them.

“Do you think that there might have been a sundered-off Napoleon who was a bumbler at strategy and who was a nervous little coward? Did there remain in backwoods Kentucky for many years a sundered-off Lincoln who gave full rein to his inborn delight in the dirty story, the dirty deal, the barefoot life, the loutishness growing? Was there a sundered-off Augustine who turned ever more Manichean, who refined more and more his arts of false logic and fornication, who howled against reason, who joined the cultishness of the crowd? Is there an anti-Christ — the man who fled naked from the garden at dusk leaving his garment behind? We know that both do not keep the garment at the moment of sundering.”

“Damned if I know, Judas Priest. Your own father-name abomination, was there another of him? Was he better or worse? I leave you.”

“She is in town and is going to meet you tonight,” Joe Zabotsky told Clem at their next monthly meeting. “We’ve got it all set up.”

“No, no, not Veronica!” Clem was startled. “I’m not ready for it.”

“She is. She’s a strong-minded woman, and she knows what she wants.”

“No she doesn’t, Joe. I’m afraid of it. I haven’t touched a woman since Veronica.”

“Damn it, Clem, this is Veronica that we’re talking about. It isn’t as though you weren’t still married to her.”

“I’m still afraid of it, Joe. I’ve become something unnatural now. Where am I supposed to meet her? Oh, oh you son of a snake! I can feel her presence. She was already in the place when I came in. No, no, Veronica, I’m not the proper one. It’s all a case of mistaken identity.”

“It sure is, Clem Clam,” said the strong-minded Veronica as she came to their table. “Come along now. You’re going to have more explaining to do than any man I ever heard of.”

But I can’t explain it, Veronica. I can’t explain any of it.”

“You will try real hard, Clem. We both will. Thank you, Mr. Zabotsky, for your discretion in an odd situation.”

Well, it went pretty well, so well in fact there had to be a catch to it. Veronica was an unusual and desirable woman, and Clem had missed her. They did the town mildly. They used to do it once a year, but they had been apart in their present persons for several years. And yet

Veronica would want to revisit “that little place we were last year, oh, but that wasn’t you, was it, Clem? — that was Clem,” and that kind of talk was confusing.

They dined grandly, and they talked intimately but nervously. There was real love between them, or among them, or around them somehow. They didn’t understand how it had turned grotesque.

“He never quite forgave you for clearing out the accounts,” Veronica said.

“But it was my money, Veronica,” Clem insisted. “I earned it by the sweat of my tongue and my brain. He had nothing to do with it.”

“But you’re wrong, dear Clem. You worked equally for it when you were one. You should have taken only half of it.”

They came back to Veronica’s hotel, and one of the clerks looked at Clem suspiciously.

“Didn’t you just go up, and then come down, and then go up again?” he asked.

“I have my ups and downs, but you may mean some thing else,” Clem said.

“Now don’t be nervous, dear,” Veronica said. They were up in Veronica’s room now, and Clem was looking around very nervously. He had jumped at a mirror, not being sure that it was.

“I am still your wife,” Veronica said, “and nothing has changed, except everything. I don’t know how, but I’m going to put things together again. You have to have missed me! Give now!” And she swept him off his feet as though he were a child. Clem had always loved her for her sudden strength. If you haven’t been up in Veronica’s arms, then you haven’t been anywhere.

“Get your pumpkin-picking hands off my wife, you filthy oaf!” a voice cracked out like a bullwhip, and Veronica dropped Clem thuddingly from the surprise of it.

“Oh, Clem!” she said with exasperation, “you shouldn’t have come here when I was with Clem. Now you’ve spoiled everything. You can’t be jealous of each other. You’re the same man. Let’s all pack up and go home and make the best of it. Let people talk if they want to.”

“Well, I don’t know what to do,” Clem said. “This isn’t the way. There isn’t any way at all. Nothing can ever be right with us when we are three.”

“There is a way,” Veronica said with sudden steel in her voice. “You

boys will just have to get together again. I am laying down the law now. For a starter each of you lose a hundred pounds. I give you a month for it. You're both on bread and water from now on. No, come to think of it, no bread! No water either; that may be fattening, too. You're both on nothing for a month."

"We won't do it," both Clems said. "It'd kill us."

"Let it kill you then," Veronica said. "You're no good to me the way you are. You'll lose the weight. I think that will be the trigger action. Then we will all go back to Rock Island or whatever town that was and get the same hotel room where one of you rose in a daze and left the other one unconscious on the bed. We will recreate those circumstances and see if you two can't get together again."

"Veronica," Clem said, "it is physically and biologically impossible."

"Also topologically absurd."

"You should have thought of that when you came apart. All you have to do now is get together again. Do it! I'm laying down an ultimatum. There's no other way. You two will just have to get together again."

"There is another way," Clem said in a voice so sharp that it scared both Veronica and Clem.

"What? What is it?" they asked him.

"Veronica, you've got to divide," Clem said. "You've got to come apart."

"Oh, no. No!"

"Now you put on a hundred pounds just as fast as you can, Veronica. Clem," Clem said, "go get a dozen steaks up here for her to start on. And about thirty pounds of bone meal, whatever that is. It sounds like it might help."

"I'll do it, I'll do it," Clem cried, "and a couple of gallons of blood-pudding. Hey, I wonder where I can get that much blood-pudding this time of night?"

"Boys, are you serious? Do you think it'll work?" Veronica gasped. "I'll try anything. How do I start?"

"Think divisive thoughts," Clem shouted as he started out for the steaks and bone meal and blood-pudding.

"I don't know any," Veronica said. "Oh, yes I do! I'll think them. We'll do everything! We'll make it work."

"You have a lot going for you, Veronica," Clem said. "You've always

been a double-dealer. And your own mother always said that you were two-faced.”

“Oh, I know it, I know it! We’ll do everything. We’ll make it work. We’ll leave no stone unthrown.”

“You’ve got to become a pair, Veronica,” Clem said at one of their sessions. “Think of pairs.”

“Crocodiles and alligators, Clem,” she said, “frogs and toads. Eels and lampreys.”

“Horses and asses, Veronica,” Clem said, “elk and moose. Rabbits and hares.”

“Mushrooms and toadstools, Veronica,” Clem said. “Mosses and lichens. Butterflies and moths.”

“Camels and dromedaries, Clem,” Veronica said. “Salamanders and newts, dragonfly and damselfly.”

Say, they thought about pairs by the long ton. They thought every kind of sundering and divisive thought. They plumbed the depths of psychology and biology, and called in some of the most respected quacks of the city for advice.

No people ever tried anything harder. Veronica and Clem and Clem did everything they could think of. They gave it a month. “I’ll do it or bust,” Veronica said.

And they came close, so close that you could feel it. Veronica weighed up a hundred pounds well within the month, and then coasted in on double brandies. It was done all hut the final thing.

Pay homage to her, people! She was a valiant woman! They both said that about her after it was over with.

They would admire her as long as they lived. She had given it everything.

“I’ll do it or bust,” she had said.

And after they had gathered her remains together and buried her, it left a gap in their lives, in Clem’s more than in Clem’s, since Clem had already been deprived of her for these last several years.

And a special honor they paid her.

They set two headstones on her grave. One of them said ‘Veronica.’ And the other one said ‘Veronica.’

She’d have liked that.

## THE ULTIMATE CREATURE

### I

The old Galaxy maps (imitating early Earth maps, partly in humor and partly through intuition) pictured strong creatures in the far arms of the system — Serpents bigger than Spaceships, Ganymede-type Tigers, fish-tailed Maids, grand Dolphins, and Island-sized Androids. We think particularly of the wry masterpieces of Grobin. And at the end of the Far or Seventh arm of the Galaxy is shown the Ultimate Creature.

The Ultimate Creature had the form of a Woman, and it bore three signs in Chaldee: The Sign of Treasure; the Sign of the Fish Mashur (the queerest fish of them all); and the Sign of Restitution or of Floating Justice.

Floating Justice is the ethical equivalent of the Isostasis of the Geologists. It states in principle that every unbalance will be brought into new balance, sometimes gently, sometimes as by planet-quake; that the most submerged may be elevated, by a great sundering of strata, to the highest point, if such is required for compensation. And there is a final tenet of this Floating Justice, that some day, somewhere, the meanest man of all the worlds will possess the ultimate treasure of the worlds. Without this promise, the worlds would be out of balance forever.

The meanest man of all the worlds was Peter Feeney — a low-down sniveler, a weak man. In one thing only he was exceptional — he had the finest eye for beauty in a woman of any man anywhere: this, though of all men he was the least successful with women. His purity of appraisal was not dulled by close contact or possession. His judgments of beauty were sound and uncompromised, though sometimes bitter.

And really, how many beautiful women are there in the Universe?

Six.

Only six? Are you sure? All that noise has been about only six of them?

Pete Feeney was sure. His rapid eyes — the only rapid things about him — had scanned millions of women in his random travels. And only six of the women could be called beautiful.

There was the lady on Mellionella, seen only once in a crowd, followed and lost, and never seen again in a year's search.

There was the girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet.

And this girl there was something that caused agony to Peter: he had heard her speak; she spoke like a girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet. He prayed that she might be struck dumb; knowing that it was an evil prayer, knowing that she was one of the really beautiful ones, whatever the sound of her.

There was the girl of shallow virtue on Leucite. She was perfect. What else can you say after that?

There was the mother of six on Camiroi — no longer young, of no particular repose or station or ease, hurried, impatient, and quite likely the most beautiful woman who ever lived.

On Trader Planet there was a young Jewess of bewildering kindness and frankness and of inextricably entangled life.

In San Juan, on old Earth, there was a fine creature who combined the three main ethnic strains of old mankind. Peter made a second journey there to see her; after first vision and departure he had not been able to believe what he had seen.

Six in all the worlds? Somehow there should have been more beautiful women than that.

Then Peter saw Teresa.

And she made the seventh?

No. She made the first. The six faded. There was only one. The most beautiful woman ever, in the farthest arm of the Galaxy — the Ultimate Creature.

## II

This was on Groll's Planet. To get there, said the agent in Electrum, you go to the end of the Galaxy, and turn left. It was a shabby little world in the boondocks that are beyond the boondocks, and only shabby people came there.

Peter Feeney was a salesman of a Universe-wide product. He wasn't a good salesman. He was shuffled off to poorer and poorer territories. Now he had fallen to the poorest territory of all.

And on that day on Groll's Planet, he heard a sound as though a swish of silk had passed over him, a thread, a mesh. It was the invisible net.

"Oh how strange are the Fish of Far Ocean!" an ancient poet exclaimed.

Peter had seen Teresa, and it was all over with him.

Peter was eating that day by peculiar arrangement. It was the smallest of the towns of Groll's Planet and there was no public eating place there. But a Grollian man raked clean sand and set a mat for Peter to sit on, and served him a meal there on a crate or box. The man also gave him coffee — good coffee, but not like the coffee you know.

It was very like a sidewalk-cafe. It was in the way where people came and went, though not properly a sidewalk. Teresa came and sat down opposite Peter on the raked sand.

"Hari bagus," Peter said, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Grollian language.

"Bagus," said Teresa. And that is all that they said to each other that day.

Peter finished his meal and attempted to light a cigar. The cigars of that world are not factory made. They are rolled by hand of an oblong leaf for the flier and a triangular leaf for the wrapper. Often they will keep their form for an hour or more, but Peter had made his cigar badly and it was not stable.

Now it exploded into an unmanageable disarray of leaves and pieces, and Peter was unable to cope with it. Teresa took the pieces and rolled and folded them into a green cylinder that was sheer art. She licked it with the most beautiful tongue in the world and gave the reconstituted cigar to Peter.

Then it was luxurious to sit there in the green shade and smoke opposite the most beautiful woman ever. When he had finished, Peter

rose awkwardly and left. But he was pleased.

He watched from a distance. Teresa with quick competence ate up all that he had left. “She was very hungry,” Peter said, and admired her quickness about things. She rose with flowing grace, retrieved the smoldering remnants of Peter’s cigar, and went toward the beach, trailing smoke from the green-leaf stogie and moving like a queen.

The next day Peter again sat on the mat on the raked sand and ate the food that the Grollian man sold him. Once more he felt the swish of the invisible net over him, and again Teresa sat opposite him on the sand.

“A senhora tem grande beleza,” said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Galactic Brazilian language.

“Noa em nossos dias,” said Teresa, “porem outrora.” And that is all that they said to each other that day.

But he had told her that she was beautiful. And she had answered: No, she was not so now, but in a former time she had been.

When he had finished the meal and pulled the cigar from his pocket he was pleased when it exploded into its constituent parts. Teresa rescued it, reassembled it, and licked it. Her tongue had a tripart curve in it, more extensible, more flexible, more beautiful than other tongues. Then Peter rose and left as he had the day before. And again Teresa cleaned up the remnants — ravenously and beautifully. He watched her till she finally went toward the beach haloed in blue smoke from the stub of the cigar.

Peter wrote up an order that day. It was not a good order, not sufficient to pay expenses, but something. Groll’s Planet had acquired a glow for him, just as if it was a good order he had written up.

On the third day, Peter again sat on the mat that was very like a sidewalk-cafe, and Teresa was opposite him. Peter told the Grollian man that he should also bring food for the woman. He brought it, but angrily.

“You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the English language.

“I have told you that I am not now beautiful, but that once I was,” Teresa told him. “Through the grace of God, I may again regain my lost beauty.”

“How is it that you know English?”

“I was the school-teach.”

“And now?”



“Now it goes bad for our world. There is no longer schools. I am nothing.”

“What are you, girl? Old human? Groll’s Troll? That isn’t possible. What?”

“Who can say? A book-man has said that the biology of our planet goes from the odd to the incredible. Was that not nice thing to say about us? My father was old human, a traveling man, a bum.”

“And your mother?”

“A queer fish, mama. Of this world, though.”

“And you were once even more beautiful than you are now, Teresa? How could you have looked?” “How I looked then? As in English — Wow! — a colloquialism.” “To me you are perfect.”

“No. I am a poor wasted bird now. But once I was beautiful.”

“There must be some livelihood for you. what did your father do?”

“Outside of bum, he was fisherman.”

“Then why do you not fish?”

“In my own way, I fish.” Peter heard again the swish of the invisible net, but he was very willing to be taken by it. After this, things went famously between them.

But two days later there came a shame to Peter. He and Teresa were sitting and eating together on the mat, and the Grollian man came out.

“Are you near finished?” he asked Peter.

“Yes, I am near finished. Why do you ask?”

“Are you finished with the fork yet?”

“No, not quite finished with it.”

“I must have the fork,” the Grollian man said. “There is another human man here, of the better sort. I must have the fork for him to eat with.”

“Have you but one?”

“Am I a millionaire that I should have a multiplicity of forks in my house? He is a man with an important look, and I will not have him wait.”

“This is humiliating,” said Peter.

“I don’t know what that is. I want my fork.”

Peter gave the fork back to the Grollian man, and that man took it in and set it before the human man of the better sort as a sign of the modernity of his house.

“Were I not the meanest and weakest of men, he would not have

abused me so,” Peter said.

“Do you not feel it at all,” Teresa said. “Somebody has to be the meanest and the weakest. The worlds are full of humiliating things. This brings us close together.”

This would have to be the final day for Peter Feeney on Groll’s Planet. He had already garnered all the insufficient orders possible for his product. He walked with Teresa and said the difficult things.

“When you have caught one, Teresa, you must do something with it. Even turn it loose if you do not mean to keep it.” “Do you want I should turn you loose, Peter?”

“No. I want you to go with me on the ship when it goes tonight.”

“There is only one way I will go.”

“I have never thought of any other way.”

“You will never have cause to be ashamed of me, Peter. I can dress, where I have the means for it. I can play the lady, I understand how it is done. I have even learned to walk in shoes. Were we in some more lucky place, it might be that I would regain my beauty. It is the grinding hard times that took it from me. I would change your luck. I have the languages, and the sense of things, and I am much more intelligent than you are, With me, you could attain a degree of success in even your miserable trade. It can be a good life we make.”

There is a sound when the invisible net is cast over one. There is another sound when it is pulled in — the faint clicking of the floats, the tugging whisper of the weights, the squeaking of the lines when pulled taut. Teresa was a fisherman’s daughter, and she knew how to do it. The Peter-fish was not a large nor a fat one, but she knew that he was the best she could take in these waters.

They were married. They left in the ship for a happier place, a better planet in a more amenable location where Teresa might regain her lost beauty.

Floating Justice was achieved. All inequities were compensated. The meanest and weakest man in the universe now possessed the Ultimate Treasure of the universe.

Naturally they were happy. And naturally their happiness endured.

“There wasn’t a catch to it?” you ask out of a crooked face. “There is always a catch to it. It always goes sour at the end.”

No. There was not a catch to it. It was perfect, and forever. It is only in

perverted fables that things go wrong at the end.

They grew in understanding of each other, received the glad news of coming progeny, waxed (by former standards) in wealth, and were no longer mean and inconsequential. Only one man can be married to the most beautiful woman in the universe, and it passes all understanding that that one man should be Peter feeney.

This was perfection. It wasn't just that Teresa had regained her "former beauty" and now weighed well over two hundred pounds. Peter liked that part of it.

But is it possible for perfection to become too perfect?

### III

For this was perfection. They lived on a kindred but larger and better world, one of richer resources and even more varied biology. They had a love so many-sided and deep that there is no accounting for it, and children so rare and different!

Floating Justice had been achieved. The least man in all the worlds did possess the Ultimate Creature. The balance was consummated. But Floating Justice had a grin on his face; there is something a little fishy about anything, even justice, that floats. You understand that there wasn't really a catch to this, nor any deficiency. It was rather a richness almost beyond handling. It was still better for Peter Feeney than for anyone else anywhere. That must be understood.

But, for all that, there was a small adjustment after the great compensation; a proportion must be re-established in all things, even happiness. It was the joke that the old Interior Ocean always cast up, and it must be taken in the salty humor that is intended.

Children so rare and so different — and so many of them! No couple was ever so blessed as were Peter and Teresa with a rich variety of children. Some of them were playing and leaping in the hills and rocks behind Peter, and some of them were sporting in the Ocean before him.

Peter whistled some of these sea children up now as he pondered things in the marina. Some of them broke water, splashed, and waved to him. So many of the kids there were, and such good ones!

“Whistle about four of them to come in for dinner!” Teresa called, and Peter did so. It had been an odd business about the children, not unpleasant certainly, but not what he had expected either. And even yet, every possibility was still open to them.

“I'd like to have a people-kid sometime,” Teresa said. “After all, mama had me. A people kid have fun playing with the fish kids, and they like him, too. And he could climb in the rocks with the Groll's Trolls. He would sort of knit our family together. You think about it, Peter, and I think about it too, and we see what we come up with at the next milting time.”

Peter Feeny gazed out at his children in the pools of the sea, and at his other sort of children climbing in the rocks, and he felt an uneasy pride in them all. One comes quickly to love Fish Kids and Groll's Trolls when they are the product of one's own loins. There was ever hope, there would

ever be hope to the last, of children of Peter's own kind. But he loved his present progeny not the less for it. The four kids that he had whistled in came now.

“Oh, four such pretty kids of ours!” Teresa said. “Fry them, Peter.”

And Peter took the pretty fish kids that came from the water and began to fix them for the pan.

This had taken the longest to get used to. But when you have so many of them — more than ten thousand, and more coming all the time — and when they are so good; and when, moreover, they are already flesh of your flesh.

Peter Feeney fixed the fish kids for the pan. And out of his fullness and mingled emotions, salt tears rolled down his shining face to the salt sea.

## HOW THEY GAVE IT BACK

He was the mayor of Big Island. Giuseppe Juan Sehiome O'Hanlon was his name, John the mayor, a shining black man. He was born into a political family and was given the names to please as many groups as possible. He had once been of imposing appearance and quiet dignity. He was not now. He shrilled and keened and moaned, and sometimes he was irrational.

It was his leg that hurt him, and his soul.

His leg hurt him because of the pin clear through it, the pin that was part of the shackle. This shackle could not be unlocked mechanically. It was a psychic-coded lock on the shackle, and it could only be released when John had somehow fulfilled his job and obtained his own release. The shackle bound his leg not only to his desk but also to a steel stanchion that was part of the steel frame of the building.

John's soul hurt him because Big Island was no longer the great thing to which he had been devoted. It had never been so in his lifetime. It was neo-jungle now, probably the most savage of them all. Even now there were fires burning on the floor above him and on the floor below him. There were always fires burning somewhere in the building, in every building that still had anything that would burn. There were rats in the room, in every room, but perhaps John saw more of them than were there. He lived in perpetual delirium.

There were (he knew, though he could no longer go out and see) people unburied in the streets, people knifed down hourly, people crazy and empty-eyed or glitter-eyed. There were horrible hom-music and git-fiddle music and jangle shouting; and he prisoner for life in his own office. This was not to be a great administrator of a great city. The emphasis had somehow shifted. But he had loved the city and the island, or the memory of them. And this hurt his soul.

"You have to stay on the job and run the place for the rest of your life," Commissioner Kreger had told John the mayor just before the commissioner had cut and run for it. "There will, of course, be no more elections. The burlesque that brought you in was enough to end the process. It was fiasco."

"It was not," John the mayor moaned in pain. "It was high triumph, the man of the people called to head the people, a noble thing, the climax

and sole goal of my life. I won it finally. They can't take that away from me."

"How does it taste, John?"

"I'm dying, do not taunt me. What went wrong?"

"It went wrong a hundred years before you were born, John. You lived all your life in a dream, and you had better try to re-enter it. You're here for good. You're the ultimate patsy, John."

"I'll kill myself."

"No, you will not. You were allowed to this job because by temperament and religion, the residue of your dream, you were incapable of suicide. So many of our mayors have taken that easy way out! It was a nuisance, John."

"I'll go crazy then," John the mayor moaned.

"No, you likely will not do that either, though it would not matter if you did. You are already psychotic, of course, but you will not go off much further. Stay and suffer, kid. You have no choice."

"Kreger, isn't there some way we can get shet of this whole island? Sell it, transfer title to it, give it back to someone? Can't we get out from under?"

"You find a way, John. Those things that we once thought of as abstractions have taken a direct hand now, Final Responsibility, Ultimate Justice, things like that. They must be satisfied. Whatever you do will have to satisfy the psychic-coded lock on your shackles to give you release. Sell the island legal, if you can find someone to sell it to. Transfer it, if you can find someone to accept the transfer. But it must be for Fair Value or Value Justified or Original Value from Original Entailment. The psychic-code thing will know. It's governed by the Equity Factor."

Then Commissioner Kreger left John the mayor, left the island, and went to rich fishing in other troubled (but not completely polluted) waters. There was no more profit for that smart man to shake out of the island.

That had been two years ago, and John the mayor had been the only official on the island since that time, His only contacts with the world were the sharp noises and smells that came in through his broken windows, and the visits of five feudal or wrangle leaders, the Duke, the Sky, the Wideman, the Cloud, and the Lob.

Duke Durango was as smooth a gutter-fighter as ever came to the top

of his heap, a happy fellow. Lawrence Sky was a fair white man named for the color of his big icy-blue eyes, a shambling giant, a giggling killer. Wideman Wyle was a wide man indeed, a cheerful sadist who told really funny stories and was the most pleasant person in the group. Cloud Clinkenbeard was a dour and stormy fellow, mean and relentless, and always in search of dirty novelty. Lolo Loudermilk was a girl, sort of a girl, a flaming mixed creature full of vitality and noise.

They were the mayor's only contacts. They were the leaders of one of the gangs that had endured, when the ten thousand gangs had eaten each other up and declined to a hundred.

All five of them came into the mayor's office, eating noisily.

"Food train in!" announced the Duke. "We killed just one of the drivers. They say there'll never be another train in if we kill more than one driver at a time. And we had to give up four hostages for it. Isn't four too many, John?"

"Numbers have no meaning in this evil thing," said John the mayor. "How many hostages have you left?"

"Twenty," and a few more, I think. We don't all count the same when we get to the big numbers. But I think four is too many to give for a food train. What will happen when we run out of hostages? Who'll give the big damn to subscribe a train for us then, when we have no more important people to trade to the important people off-island? Here, sign this, limp-leg John, and the Cloud will take it back to them."

The mayor read the release and signed it. Each of the five feudal leaders looked it over in turn then. Several of them could read a little (it was for this reason that they were the mayor's contacts), and it would be hard for Mayor John to write anything phony on that release and slip it past them. The mayor had to sign these releases every time a food train came, and he knew what would happen when they ran out of hostages. The blackmail would be over when the last hostage of value or affection to someone off-island had been turned over for a food train. The off-island people would let the island rot. The trains had been the only food source for the island for years.

The Cloud took the release and went out through the smouldering corridor and into the broken streets to the food train that came once a month through the last not-completely broken tunnel.

"Something else came on the food trail, gimpy John," the Duke said



uneasily.

“Well, what, what was it? Duke, Duke, you didn’t get hold of a saw so I could saw my leg off, did you?”

“Nah. You’re not supposed to saw your leg off. You’re supposed to stay here just like you are. Who’s going to sign for the food trains and hostage transfers if our mayor saws his leg off and runs away?”

“John Mayor, there’s three other men came on that food train. These are funny men. They might even be important enough men that we can hold them for hostages. They brought some heavy kegs and boxes with them, John, and they even conned some of the colts into carrying them over here for them. We can’t figure out what kind of men they are, Mayor. They look at us and we look at them, and we both got sparks in our eyes. They are in the building now, Mayor, and they want to see you.”

“Show them in, spook Duke, the mayor is always available to his constituents.”

“Constituents these are not,” said the Lob. “They are washed-out pale fellows, but they are solid.”

“And one of those kegs of theirs got a smell I like, Mayor,” said the Sky. “I believe I remember that smell like it was born in me. You get that keg, Mayor.”

“And those long crates got a heft I like,” said the Wideman. “I almost know what will be in those crates. You get those crates, Mayor.”

“Those square boxes got a feel I like,” said the Lob. “I almost know what short-handled things will be in those square boxes. And the smallest package has a brass glint through a rip in it. You get those square boxes and that smallest package, Mayor.”

“I don’t understand this at all,” said John the mayor, rolling his red-rimmed eyes in his constant pain. “Let the men and their baggage come in.”

The three new men who came in had a certain animal power about them, and a certain human authority. Possibly they might be important enough to hold for hostages, but who was going to take the lead in holding them? Men, they moved like big cats. But they were dressed like businessmen of an earlier decade, an anomaly on the island, and they were lighter than any of the islanders there except Lawrence Sky.

“You are the Mayor Johnjohn?” asked one of the new men. “And you have authority to deal?”

“I am the mayor,” said John, “and I have such authority as a shackled prisoner may have, For what do we deal?”

“Oh, for the island. We’ve come to buy it. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“What, what, who are you?”

“I am Adrian Sweetsong,” said the first of the new men. “I’m a petroleum geologist by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter. And I’m an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club.”

“I’m Dennis Halftown,” said the second of the new men. “I’m an electronic engineer by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter either. And I’m also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club.”

“I’m Freddy Flatfish,” said the third of the new men. “I’m a lawyer, which does have something to do with this matter. I am also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club, and I have studied the legal aspects of this thing pretty thoroughly.”

“Is it the Midlands Gun and Rod Club that is dealing for the island?” Mayor John asked.

“That’s right,” said Adrian Sweetsong, the first of the new men. “First installment! Set em right there, boys.”

Several of the colts, the strong rough island boys, set down two heavy square boxes, and Dennis Halftown (the second of the new men) broke them open with a pry.bar.

“Man-eating Millie! Those things are for me!” the Lob gasped, and she had a couple of them out in her hands.

“Sweet little choppies!” the Sky drooled. “What’s a knife along side of one of those?”

“Black-berry pudding!” cried the Cloud as he returned from his errand. “Here, here, they look good, let’s get them tested. I’ll just pass a dozen of those out the windows to some of the boys. Let them try them out! Let them fall in love with them!”

“Fifty hatchets,” announced Adrian Sweetsong, “delivered and accepted. We record them.”

“Wait! Wait!” howled Mayor John jangling his shackles. “What have fifty hatchets to do with dealing for the island? Who has used hatchets for a century?”

“One-leg John,” the Duke crooned, “too bad your shackles won’t let

you get as far as the window. Some of the boys are using them now. Believe me, John, they're using them now!"

"Mr. Sweetsong," Mayor John explained patiently, "the last valuation of island property ever made set it at over a hundred billion dollars. Due to certain developments, it may be down a little now, but not that far. Hatchets will not get it. I can sell it only for Fair Value or Value Justified. My own shackling is governed by the Equity Factor."

"We know that, Mr. Mayor," said Freddy Flatfish, the lawyer for the Midlands Gun and Rod Club. Freddy Flatfish was a tow-headed, twinkling man. "But the island has reverted. It's really worthless since it was left to the ten thousand gangs, which have since devoured themselves down to a hundred. Perhaps its reverted value is now its original value. Anyhow, the first approach was yours."

"Mine? Mine? I made no approach. I never heard of you fellows," the Mayor said.

"But we have monitored you, Mayor John. Two years ago you said to the commissioner 'Can't we give it back to someone?' And you are also recorded as saying 'We ought to sell it back to —'"

"Second installment!" announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Set them right there, boys."

Several of the colts set down the long crates, and Dennis Halftown broken them open with his pry-bar.

"Oh, those long sweet songs!" the Wideman slavered. "Smooth bores! You can jam them with any kind of soup at all and pan-light them. You can shoot broken glass with them. You can shoot anything. Here, we'll just hand a few of them out the windows and let the fellows try them out. Get the heft of those things! Even as clubs your hands would fall in love with them! Blunderbusses!" And the Wideman handed half a dozen of them out the windows.

"Twenty guns," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Delivered and accepted. We record them."

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for things of no value," John the mayor began — and there was deep-throated roaring and death-screaming in the streets —

"No value, Mayor?" the Duke Durango asked with deep irony. "Mayor, you should be able to watch them. They jam them with soup, and then ram in glass and nails for a load. They spark them off, and it's wonderful.

Cuts people right in two. Don't talk no value about those things!"

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for such things, what could the Midlands Gun and Rod Club possibly do with the island?" Mayor John asked. "Set up a hunting preserve," Adrian Sweetsong said. "It's a nicely stocked jungle island seventeen miles by four. We'll hunt. We'll hunt."

"Hunt? What would you hunt?" the mayor wanted to know.

"Big game, big game," said Dennis Halftown lovingly.

"But there is no big game, no game at all on the island," the mayor insisted.

"Remember what ancient Hemingway wrote," said Freddy Flatfish. "There is no sport equal to the hunting of an armed man.' Ah, we'll hunt them here, as will many of our well-heeled members."

"Third installment! Set it right there, boys," Adrian Sweetsong ordered.

The ragged island boys set down the bag, and Dennis Halftown broke it open with his pry-bar.

"Boys, boys, that's the smell like was born in me!" the Sky chortled, and he had his arms up to the elbows in the dark grainy powder. "Sure it hasn't the power of soup. Sure it's clumsy and crude. But it's the grandpa of them all! The smell of it, the smell of it! Men, men, bust your noses on that smell!"

"Twenty-five kilograms of gun-powder," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "That's as close as we could figure it. Twenty-five kilos delivered and accepted. We record it."

"When you going to start, fellows, when you going to start?" the Duke asked the three new men in excitement, getting the idea. "How soon you he ready to start?" asked the Duke and the Sky and the Wideman and the Cloud and the Lob, all going for it avidly.

"Should he the first bunch of hunters here in the morning," said Adrian Sweetsong.

"Too long to wait," the Lob protested. "You three? How about you?"

"We three will begin stalking and pot-shotting in a very few minutes," said the Adrian, "just as soon as we can get title to this place from the reluctant mayor. We suggest you deploy your forces outside in the corridors. When we come out of this room we will come out rough, and it's rough animals we want to meet with."

“Rough it will be,” said the Cloud. “Colts, colts, you carry this stuff out to our place again just as soon as they have recorded it. Men, we will have some sport! We will show these sports some sport!”

“But this cannot be, even in a nightmare,” Mayor John protested. “You three pale-browns are not Wappingers or Manahattas, and we are not Dutch.”

“I’m a Choctaw,” said Freddy Flatfish. “Dennis Halftown is a Shawnee. Adrian Sweetsong is an Osage. But we inherit. I have drawn up a legal brief to prove it. And you are double-Dutch if you don’t accept. Awk, blew half my shoulder off! Those animals are jumping the gun. Now I know how the expression started. They really know how to handle those blunderbusses.”

Freddy Flatfish had been shot by a blunderbuss blast from the corridor and was bleeding badly. So they hurried it along, anxious to close the bargain and get the hunting season started.

“Bring them in fast, boys. Set them down till they are accepted and recorded. Then take them out again to your place,” Adrian Sweetsong ordered. And the rough colts brought in a variety of boxes and packages.

“Ten shirts, accepted and recorded,” Adrian Sweetsong announced, hurriedly now. “Thirty pair socks, accepted and recorded. One hundred bullets, accepted and recorded. Forty kettles, accepted and recorded. One brass frying-pan, accepted and recorded.”

And at the recording of the brass frying-pan, the leg-piercing pin was withdrawn from the leg of Mayor John and all his shackles fell off. The psychic-coded lock of his shackles had opened. He had finished his job and was released. He had disposed of the island in equity. He had gotten Fair Value for it, or Value Justified, or at least Original Value from Original Entailment. And it sufficed.

Mayor John was free. He started to run from the room, fell down on his crippled leg, and arose and ran once more. And was caught in a blunderbuss blast.

And then the great hunt began. The three members of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club had most sophisticated weapons. They were canny and smooth. This was the dangerous big-game hunt they had always dreamed of. And their prey were armed and wild and truculent and joyous.

It would be good.

Out between the orbs, several tentacles of Ultimate Justice came near

together. "Was there not somewhere the mention of twenty-four or twenty-six dollars paid?" one tentacle asked the other. "I thought I remembered some such figure."

"No, no," said the other tentacle, "That was only the estimated value placed on the material. There was no specie paid. The list is correct as rendered, and the repayment has been accepted and certified."

In a forgotten and half-filled basement on the island, two of the remaining old-folk people were still in hiding. They were startled by the new sort of noise.

"What is it, papa? What have they done?" the old woman asked.

"Sold it back to the Indians, mama," the old man said.

"Why have they not thought of that a long time ago?"

## McGRUDER'S MARVELS

There were four bids, and there should have been only three. Only three firms in the country were capable of making so miniaturized a control station.

Three bids were in quite heavy packets. The fourth was in I slim envelope. This was Opening INV-3MINCON3999.

“Ah, here are the bids from Micro Machinists Amalgamated, from Intensive Instrumentation, and from DOW-MEC-TEC,” said Colonel Ludenschiager. “It isn’t likely that any of them will be less than two years, and we need it within two weeks. We are whipped before we start!” He struck the table with a ringing thud. “But what is the anomalous intrusion, the small envelope bid, Dinneen?”

“It’s from an M. M. McGruder,” said Colonel Dinneen. “The second M is in quotation marks. We may have a case for the prosecution here. The Joker Act was set up for just such stuff as this. There has to be a ceiling put on cranks.”

“There was a certain McGruder in Manhattan when I was a boy,” Colonel Schachmeister smiled. “I spent many pleasant moments in his, ah, Hippodrome, I believe he called it. It was a narrow place off a narrow cigar store, and only about three could get in at one time, if they were small, and we were. Best show I ever saw for a dim , though. What is the address of this one?”

“Here in D. C.,” said Dinneen. “It would be a rundown address even without the ending ‘Apt. 3, room 4-E, use cellar steps off small alley.’ Some address! And the phone number of the Rowdy-Dow Bar and Grill is given. It’s written in an old and probably insane hand. We will prosecute with compassion, possibly.”

The chime chimed for 9:30. It was opening time. And they opened the bids.

They quickly made the basic resume:

1. Micro Machinists Amalgamated. Basic Module: \$2,106,740.00. Estimated Time: 25 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 256 (detailed). Follow-Up Units: \$260,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 30 days each for first 6, grading down to 21 days each for additional.

2. Intensive Instrumentation. Basic Module: \$2,004,000.00. Estimated Time: 721 days. Exceptions and Alternatives: 228 (detailed).

The Follow-Up Units: \$248,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 28 days each for first 4, 19 days each for additional.

3. Dow-Mec-Tech. Basic Module: \$1,999,999.98. Estimated Time: 23 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 204 (detailed). Follow-up Units: \$235,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 21 days each for first 9, 16 days each for additional.

4. M.'M.' McGruder. Basic Module: \$24.00. Estimated Time: 24 hours. Exceptions and Alternatives: none (undetailed). Follow-Up Units: \$24 ea. Estimated Time: 24 hours each — “this keeps going on time: as long as I live or as long as you buy them, whichever is first. Note: Got one made already. Come try it. I need the \$24.00. I don't see how anybody can make them cheaper than this.”

“We run into the impossible,” said Ludenschiager sadly. “We need one within two weeks or we may as well forget the program. And if we forget the program, we may as well forget everything. It is not for personal aggrandizement that we seek this (except for Dinneen a little), but for the good of our country and the world. There has to be a way out of this delay.”

“How about McGruder?” Schachmeister laughed sourly.

“Oh, we'll prosecute him under the Joker Act, of course,” Lodenschlager growled, “but now we have the taller thing to tackle. We have to find the way. Two years will be too late; we'll be done for by then. Two weeks will almost be too late. We must somehow break the time barrier in this.”

“We're whipped, we're whipped!” Dinneen wailed, “and our enemies will rejoice over us.” He turned on three toes and strode gloomily out of the room.

“The Covenant,” it said. “Large, hard-roasted, de-oiled, white peanuts under the Goober John trade name. Three a day, and they must be Goober John Number Ones. Failure to provide them will void the Covenant.”

“There will be no failure,” said Malcomb ‘the Marvelous’ McGruder. “It shall be done.”

“We like-stuff pledge fulfill the Covenant,’ it said.

The micro-miniatureized control station, the “bullet brain”, had to handle thirteen data flows at once. It had to do other things, including the monitoring and inhibiting of the world. It must be practically



indestructible. And it had to be about the size of an eraser on a pencil. This small size was of the greatest importance.

The smallest model of this which would handle such data properly was about a cubic meter, and it weighed a thousand kilograms. And it was itself a miniaturization.

The project is still classified, so we cannot in conscience give deep details of it. The project is still active, and perhaps an answer can be found for it this second time. Ah well, we lost the first race, and the most populous one-third of our nation; but we lost it hard. We had them near beaten for a little while there. Another year, and DOW-MEC-TEC will have their first module ready. It will probably be far too late, it will likely do no good at all, but you never know. The slimmest hope remains...

But now they were looking very hard for that answer the first time: the three colonels, the High Commission of the colonels, the potential saviors of their country and the world. It was not for personal glory they sought this (except Dinneen a little) but for the ultimate good of the ultimate number.

Colonel Dinneen strode up and down endless corridors, booming like a canary in his odd voice. He didn't want the thing in two years, he wanted it in two minutes, right now.

Colonel Ludenshclager shuffled old brain-buster notes looking for a miracle. He had an impediment there; he didn't believe in miracles.

Colonel Schachmeister walked desolately through the city, praying for the instant miniaturized control station. He walked and walked; but where did he walk?

"It is my unconscious leading me somewhere," he mumbled. "And I will follow my unconscious wherever it leads, like a man in a dream."

That Schachmeister was an unconscious phony. It wasn't his unconscious leading him anywhere! It was his conniving own self walking furtively where his own dishonesty would not allow him to walk openly. And he had that address graven on his brain by a micro-stylus.

There was something about a three-foot-wide Hippodrome from his boyhood; there was something of the credence in the incredible; and both these things were shameful to him as a man of science, and a colonel moreover.

Well, it was a shabby enough neighborhood. The alley was worse, and yet even this was not the final alley. He found it then, the "small alley",

hardly a skunk track. He followed it. He knocked crunchingly on a door and near lost his hand in the termite-eaten wood.

“Be careful there!” an ancient voice blatted out like slats falling down in an old bed. “Those are friends of my own people, and my people will not have them discommoded. After all, they are quiet, they do no harm, and they eat only wood.”

“It — it’s the same McGruder! It is Malcomb ‘the Marvelous’ McGruder himself, the Grand Master of McGruder’s Marvels!” Colonel Schachmeister detonated in wonder.

“Oh sure, little boy,” came the wonderful foice like an old organ filling with noise again and blowing the dust off itself in doing so. “And it’s the same little Heinie Schachmeister! Why aren’t you in school today, Heinie? Oh, I notice that you have grown, and perhaps yhou are too old for school now.”

“It’s marvelous to see you again, Marvelous!” Schachmeister breathed in awe. “I had no idea that you wree the same one, or that you were still alive.”

“Come in, little Heinie. And what are you doing? I have never seen your name in the Flea-Bag, so I suppose you have failed in your early ambition.”

“Ah, McGruder, I don’t know what the Flea-Bag is, and I forget what early ambition of mine you refer to.”

“The Flea-Bag, Heinie, is a mimeographed sheet that still circulates among the members of our dwindling profession. And your early ambition was to grow up and have fleas of your own.”

“Wish I had done it, McGruder, wish I had done it, especially on days like this. Some of my happiest hours were spent watching McGruder’s Marvels, that greatest of all Flea Circuses, in that little hole in the wall.”

“In the Hippodrome, you mean, Heinie? Do you remember the Coachman Set?”

“Yes, yes, and the flea up on the coachman’s seat, in livery, and with the whip! McGruder, when you screwed the three sections of the microscope together, you could see the very braiding of that coachman’s whip. And the flea in harnass! The harnass was perfect, and had little bells on it. The bells had clappers, and you could hear them jingle when you screwed that little thing into your ear. And the flea in harnass was shod, with real horse-shoes, or flea-shoes.”

“More, Heinie, more! The shoes had authentic calks on them, and nails! And the nails were of no ordinary sort, but were ancient horseshoe nails with the oblong wedge-shaped heard. You could see that when you screwed the fourth section into the microscope. And you remember the lady fleas inside the coach, Heinie?”

“Yes, yes, dressed in old Empire style with the high hair on them, and the flounce stuff. And when you screwed the little hting into your nose you could smell their perfume. What was it, McGruder?”

“Printemps. And you may not know it, but there were eight petticoats on each of those lady fleas, and the microscopic lace on even the inmost of them was done with loving care and suprassing detail, more than the nine hundred loops on the bottom round in the style that is called punto a groppo. Your eyes used to boggle at my little things, little Heinie.”

“My mind boggles at something now. That was forty years ago. McGruder, I know you were good, but this passes reason! Yopu still have your little lathes and turners and instruments here, but you did not make a miniaturized control station with such!”

“Of course not, Heinie. The detailign for the little control station had to be a thousand times finer, actually eight thousand times finer, than anything I could do on my little lathes. I’m surprised you could ask such a silly question, Heinie.”

“Is that the control station there, Marvelous?”

“That’s it, Heinie. Take it along and try and send me the twenty-four dollars if it works. I’ll have another one this time tomorrow if you wish. It’s nice to have seen you. I’m always happy when the little boys come back to see me again.”

The Marvelous McGruder still had a certain threadbare elegance about him.

“McGruder, how did you make the control station?”

“Trade secret, Heinie. You remember my patter. Everything was always a trade secret.”

“McGruder, I’m going to ask you the silliest question I’ve every asked anyone in my life. Did you fleas, somehow, manufacture the thing?”

“Certainly not, Heinie! What’s the matter with you anyhow? What do they make the colonels out of nowadays? No wonder we’re in trouble! You know how hard it is to get fleas to wear clothes even for a few seconds? You know how hard it is to teach them even the most simple trick?

Heinie, fleas are stupid, and so are you! No, I will settle that. Fleas did not, in any way at all, have anything to do with making that miniature control station. I didn't have much to do with it myself. Subcontracted it, really. No, I will not give you any more information about it. Take it and try it. Bring me the twenty-four dollars if you are satisfied. And now you had better get along or your keiferin of a mother will be after me for letting you loiter so long in my place. Oh, I forgot! You're a big boy now."

Colonel Schachmeister left the shabby elegant old man, Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder; and he took the miniaturized control station along with him.

He took it to a most secret laboratory to try it with his peers.

It worked.

"The Covenant," it said. "There are only twenty-seven Goober John Number One peanuts left here. These will last only nine days. Replenish the stock, McGruder, or the Covenant is in danger."

"I'll remember to get a package of them at the Rowdy-Dow today," old McGruder promised.

Well, there were thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation now, and our enemies could no longer rejoice over us. Their own spectacular stunt had been inhibited; their own dastardly program had been paralyzed. With another thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation, the High Commission of the colonels, the Secret Saviors of the World, would be able to inhibit anything anywhere in the world.

It was of most amazing and curious effect that such small things could do such; and the secret of it was in their very smallness. Now, the manner by which they did this — No! No! No! We may not tell it! It is more than classified; it is totally under the ban. It is still possible were four that it may yet save what is left of us.

But it was going well for the colonels in that time. And yet they wanted them faster than one a day.

"We have no desire for personal gain or glory," said Dinneen, "except myself a little. But if that crazy old man can make one a day, it should be possible for us to make a thousand. Go back to him, Schachmeister. Find out how he does it. We have spied on him, of course, but we can't understand it at all. The control stations seem to form themselves on his table there. They continue to take form even while he is asleep. And there's a further mystery. He never checked out prints of the larger model

that was to be miniaturized. What does he work from?”

“Is it true, Schachmoister, that he once operated a flea circus in New York?” Ludenschlager asked.

“Yes, it’s true enough. He’s the same man.”

“Can there be some possible connection? No, no don’t laugh! It cannot be any sillier than what is already happening.”

“No, men, there isn’t a connection. He said to me, and he was speaking the truth, that fleas did not, in any way, have anything to do with the control stations. And, yet, I remember an ugly smear against McGruder from the early years —”

“What is that Schachmeister?” Dinneen demanded avidly.

“That he sometimes used mechanical fleas. I did not believe it.”

“Go to him, Schachmeister,” Dinneen and Ludenshalager both begged. “If you cannot find out how he makes them, at least ask if he cannot make them faster.”

“The Covenant,” it said. “There are only three Goober Number One peanuts left here. Replenish the stock, McGruder, or the Covenant will come to an end this very day. I’d get you an extension for the affection I have for you, but the numerous members of the smaller orders will not hear of it. There are seven orders, as you know, each smaller than the other. Sometimes they are hard to deal with, particularly the four smaller orders which I cannot see myself. Today, McGruder, Goober Johns!”

“I swear I will remember it,” McGruder swore. “I’ll get a package at the Rowdy-Dow this very afternoon.”

Colonel Schachmeister went back to see Malcomb ‘the Marvelous’ McGruder. McGruder was no longer shabby. He was the cream of the old con men with an ivory-colored topper and canary-colored vest and gloves. He gestured with a silver-headed cane. He welcomed Heinie Schachmeister with incredible flourish, and Schachmeister came right to the point.

“Will you not tell me how you make the stations, Marvelous? It is important.”

“No. I will not tell you. It is important, to me, that I slice up this fat hog for myself, and twenty-four dollar slices please me mightily.”

“Marvelous, you did not check out a set of plans for this thing. From what do you miniaturize?”

“Well, I was going to, Heinie. I went by the place where the plans were

to be had. But I found that the prints for the gadget weighed four hundred pounds, and also that I would have to put down a token deposit of \$50,000.000 to check out a set of them. Both these things were too heavy for me. So I slipped a few of my small associates into a packet of plans (I always was a tricky man with my hands, you know), and they recorded the information in their own way.”

“Your small associates — ah — how long did it take them to record the plans?”

“About as long as it took me to light a cigar.”

“And how many of these associates were there?”

“Don’t know, Heinie. They were sixth and seventh order associates, so there must have been quite a few of them.”

“What do they look like, McGruder?”

“Don’t know. I’ve never seen them. I can see only the first order ones, and the second order ones through a strong microscope. And each order can see only two orders smaller than itself, by using extreme magnification.”

“They are not fleas?”

“Of course not, Heinie! What’s the matter with you?”

“Are they mechanical?”

“No, not mechanical. But they are mechanically inclined, in the smaller orders of them.”

“How did you become associated with them, Marvelous?”

“One of the first order ones was a friend of a flea who once worked with me. The flea introduced us, and we rather took to each other. We both know how to latch onto a good thing when we see it.”

“Marvelous, would it be possible to make more than one control station a day?”

“Sure. I just didn’t want to milk it dry too soon. Get you a dozen a day, if you want them. All it’ll take is a bigger sack of peanuts.”

“McGruder! Did I hear you right?”

“I don’t know what you heard, Heinie. I said that all it would take would be a bigger sack of peanuts. I’ll have twelve of the controls for you tomorrow, but there’s no discount for quantity. I stick by my bid. Twenty-four dollars each.”

“Marvelous, Marvelous, this is marvelous!” Colonel Schachmeister gibbered, and he rattled away from there to bring the glad news to his

associates.

“This puts us over the hump! Two days and we will have the world by its wooly tail!” Colonel Dinneen clattered. “We will have sufficient coverage now to impose our will on all nations. For their own good, we will compel them away from their errors.”

“We have no thought of personal benefit,” Colonel Ludenschlager exploded with a jingling hiss, “except Colonel Dinneen a little. We will force-feed the world on all benignity and kindness and understanding and good will. We will teach the world true happiness and order, now that we will have the power to do so.”

“We be the lords of the world now,” cried Colonel Schachmeister, “the High Commission of Colonels, saviors of the country and the the world. The President will be glad to shine our very shoes; it will teach him blessed humility. We will shape the whole world like clay in our hands. We will run the world now, and all must come down to our spring to drink. Ah, but the water is sweet, and the people will come to love it!”

The Greeks named it hybris. And in tile Ozarks they call it Peacock Fever. It was Pride. It was the Grand Arrogance, the Warrantless Assumption, the bursting summertime of Giant Pride. And it would have its fall.

“The Covenant!” it thundered like acorns rattling on the roof, and McGruder almost didn’t need the piece screwed into his ear to hear it. “These aren’t Goober John Number Ones!”

“Ah, they were out of Goober Johns at the Rowdy-Dow,” the Marvelous McGruder soothed. “These are Arizona Spanish Peanuts packaged by the Snack-Sack people. Try them. They’re even better than Goober Johns.”

“The Covenant is voided!” it said sadly. “The involvement with humanity is ended.”

And Malcomb ‘the Marvelous’ McGruder was never able to establish contact with any of them again; so that, instead of twelve of them that day, there were no control stations at all for evermore. And those already in use blinked out.

“McGruder, hey McGruder!” Colonel Schachmeister came to him.

“Ah, little Heinie, why are you not in school this day? Oh, I forget always, you are a big boy now. It is all ended, Heinie, all ended. The twenty-four dollars a day and everything is gone. I will have to live by my

wits again, and I always hate to get off a comfortable con that has kept me.”

“McGruder,” the frantic Colonel Schachmeister moaned, “it isn’t merely that there will be no more of the stations, it is that those already in service have gone dead or disappeared also. This is not possible. They were made to operate forever.”

“Don’t think so, Heinie, not after the Covenant was broken. I think that the guys in them quit when they heard about the wrong peanuts.”

“What guys? What peanuts? We’ve lost the jump on them, McGruder. A third of our country will be gone before we can institute a holding action, without the miniature stations. What made them go dead, McGruder?”

“I figure it all out now, Heinie. They didn’t make any little control stations at all. They took all of us in. They didn’t any more know how to make little control stations than I did, but they were smart enough to fake it and make them work. I tell you a thing, Heinie, and you write it down so you remember it when you got big: never trust a bug you can’t see.”

“But they worked, Marvelous! They worked perfectly till they Went dead or disappeared. They handled all the data flows perfectly. They responded, they monitored, they inhibited. Certainly they were control stations.”

“Not really, Heinie. Hey, this old town will be gone in another five minutes, won’t it! I bet that one took out thirty square blocks. Man, feel the hot blast from it even here, Your sleeve’s on fire, Heinie. Your mother will scold and moan when she sees how it’s burned. See, this is the way it was — You know the man who made all the fancy little cars so cheap, and nobody know how he did it?”

“No, no, McGruder, what is it? Oh, the asphalt is flowing like water in the streets! What do you mean?”

“A guy that bought one of those little cars lifted up the hood one day. It didn’t have a motor in it. It didn’t have any works at all in it. It’s the same as these little control stations were. It just had a little guy in pedalling the pedals to make it go. Now they quit pedalling, Heinie.”



## THIS GRAND CARCASS YET

Mord had a hopeless look when he came to Juniper Tell with the device. He offered it (or quite a small figure. He sijd he hadn't the time to haggle.

Mord had produced some unusual-looking devices in the past, but this was not of that sort. By now he had learned, apparently, to give a conventional styling to his machines, however unusual their function.

"Tell, with this device you can own the worlds," Mord swore. "And I set it cheap. Give me the small sum I ask for it. It's the last thing I'll ever ask from anyone."

"With this one I could own the worlds, Mord? Why do you not own the worlds? Why are you selling out of desperation now? I had heard that you were doing well lately."

"So I was. And so I am not now. I'm a dying man, Tell. I ask only enough to defray the expense of my burial."

"Well then, not to torture you, I will give you the sum you ask," Tell said. "But is there no cure for you, now that medicine has reached its ultimate?"

"They tell me that they could resuscitate a dead man easier, Tell. They're having some success along that line now. But I'm Rnished. The spirit and the juice are sucked out of me."

"You spent both too lavishly. You make the machines, but you never learned to let the machines assume the worry. What does the thing do, Mord?"

"The device? Oh, everything. This is Gahn (Generalized Agenda Harmonizer Nucleus). I won't introduce you, since every little machine nowadays can shake hands and indulge in vapid conversation. You two will have plenty to talk about after you've come into accord, and Gahn isn't one to waste words."

"That's an advantage. But does it do anything special?"

"The 'special' is only that which hasn't been properly fit in, and this device makes everything fit in. It resolves all details and difficulties. It can nin your business. It can run the worlds."

"Then again, why do you sell it to me for such a pittance?"

"You've done me a number of good turns, Tell. And one bad one. I am closing my affairs before I die. I want to pay you back."

“For the number of good turns, or for the one bad one?”

“That is for you to wonder. The little marvel won’t be an unmixed blessing, though it will seem so for a while.”

“I test it. Produce and draw the check for the amount, Gahn.”

Gahn did it — no great marvel. You could probably do it yourself, whether you be general purpose machine or general purpose person. Nearly any general machine could do such on command, and most humans are also able to carry out minor chores. Juniper Tell signed the check and gave it to Mord.

And Mord took the check and left, to arrange for his own burial, and then to die: a sucked-out man.

Tell assigned a quota to Gahn and stabled him with the rest of the g.p. devices. In a few seconds, however, it was apparent that Gahn did not fit into the pattern with them. The gong of the Suggestion Accumulator began to strike with regularity, and the yellow, orange, and red lights to flash. It sounded like a dozen times a minute, and ordinarily it was no more than two or three times a day. And the red lights, almost every second on prime suggestions. It’s unusual to get more than one red-light suggestion a week from the g.p. machines. Someone was loading the Accumulator, and the only new element was Gahn.

“My God, a smart one!” Tell grumbled. “I hate a smart alec machine. Yet all new departures now come from such, since humans lack the corpus of information to discern what has already been done. Whatever he’s got will have to be approved through channels. It’s had practice to let a novice pass on his own work.”

Tell gave Galin a triple quota, since his original quota was done in minutes instead of hours. And Gahn began to fit in with the other g.p. machines — violently.

A new cow or calf introduced into a herd will quickly find its proper place there. It will give hattie to every individual of its class. It will take its place above those it can whip, and below those it cannot. The same thing happens in a herd of general purpose machines. Gahn, as the newest calf in the herd, had been given position at the bottom of the line. Now the positions began to change and shuffle, and Gahn moved silently along, displacing the entities above him one by one. How it is that g.p. machines do battle is not understood by men, but on some level a struggle is maintained till one defeats the other. Gahn defeated them all and moved

to his rightful place at the head of the line. He was king of the herd, and that within an hour.

A small calf, when he has established supremacy over the other small calves, will sometimes look for more rugged pastures. He will go to the fence and bellow at the big bulls, ten times his size, in the paddock.

Gahn began to bellow, though not in sound. He sniffed the walls (though not with nose) beyond which the great specialized machines were located. He was obstreperous and he would not long remain with the calves.

It was the next day that Analgismos Nine, an old and trusted machine, came to talk to Juniper Tell.

“Sir, there is an anomalous factor on your g.p. staff,” he said. “The new addition, Gahn, is not what he seems.

“What’s wrong with him?”

“His suggestions. They could not possibly have come from a g.p. device. Few of them could come from less than a class eight complex. A fair amount are comprehensible, though barely, to a class nine like myself. And there is no way at all to analyze the remainder of them.”

“Why not, Analgismos?”

“Mr. Tell, I myself am a class nine. If these cannot be understood by me, they cannot be understood by anyone or anything ever. There is nothing beyond a class nine.”

“There is now, Analgismos. Gahn has become the first of the class ten.”

“But you know that is impossible.”

“The very words of the class eight establishment when you and others of your sort began to appear. A-nine, is that jealousy I detect in you?”

“A human word that could never do justice to it, Mr. Tell. I won’t accept it! It isn’t right!”

“Don’t you blink your lights at me, A-nine. I can discipline you.”

“It is not allowed to discipline an apparatus of the highest class.”

“But you are no longer that. Galan has superseded you. Now then, what do the suggestions of Gahn consist of, and could they be implemented?”

“They carry their own implementation. It was predicted that that would be the case with class ten suggestions, should they ever appear. The result will be the instant apprehension of the easiest way in all

affairs, which will then be seen to have been the only way. There could be the clearing of the obstructiveness of inanimate objects, and the placating of the elements. There could be ready access to all existent and contingent data. There would be no possibility of wrong guess or wrong decision in anything.”

“How far, Analgismos?”

“The sky’s off, Mr. Tell. There’s no limit to what it can do. Gahn could resolve all difficulties and details. He could run your business, or the worlds’.”

“So his inventor told me.”

“Oh? I wasn’t sure that he had one. Have a care that you yourself are not obsoleted, Mr. Tell. This new thing transcends all we have known before.”

“I’ll have a care of that too, Analgismos.”

“And now we will get down to business, Gahn,” Juniper Tell told his class ten complex the next day. “I have it on. the word of a trusted class nine that you are unique.”

“My function, Mr. Tell, is to turn the unique into the usual, into the inevitable. I break it all down and fit it in.”

“Gahn, I have in mind some little ideas for the betterment of my business.”

“Lct us not evade, Mr. Tell, unless with a purpose. You have long since used up all your own ideas and those of your machines to the ninth degree. They have brought you almost, but not quite, all the way in your chosen field. Now you have only the idea that I might have some ideas.”

“All right, you have them then. And they are effector ideas. This is what I want exactly: that a certain dozen men or creatures (and you will know who they are, since you work from both existent and contingent data) shall come to me hat in hand, to use the old phrase; that tley shall have come to my way of thinking when they come, and that they shall be completely amenable to my — your — our suggestions.”

“That they be ready to pluck? Nothing easier, Mr. Tell, but now everything becomes easy for us. We’ll hoard them and seuttle them! It’s what you want, and I will rather enjoy it myself. I’ll be at your side, but they need not know that I’m anything more than a g.p. machine. And do not worry about your own acts: it will be given you what to say and do. When you feel my words come into your mind, say them. They will be

right even when they seem most wrong. And I have added two names to the list you have in your own mind. They are more important than you realize, and when we have digested them we will be much the fatter and glossier for it.

“Ah, Mr. Tell, your own number one selection is even now at the door! He has traveled through a long night and has now come to you, he came in talon. It is the Asteroid Midas himself. Please control your ornithophobia.”

“But Gahn, he would have to have started many hours ago to be here now; he would have to have started long before our decision to take this step.”

“Anterior adjustment is a handy trick, Mr. Tell. It is a simple trick, but we do not want it to seem simple — to others.”

They plucked that Asteroid Bird, the two of them, man and machine. He had been one of the richest and most extended of all creatures, with a pinion on every planet. They left the great Midas with scarcely a tail feather. When Tell and Gahn did business with a fellow now, they really did business.

And the Midas was only one of the more than a dozen great ones they took that day. They took them in devious ways that were later seen to be the most direct ways, the only ways possible for the accomplishment. And man and machine had suddenly become so rich that it scared the man. They gorged, they reveled in it, they looted, they gobbled.

The method of the take-overs, the boarding and scuttling, would be of interest only to those desirous of acquiring money or power or prestige. We suppose there to be no such crass persons in present company. Should the method be given out, low persons would latch onto it and follow it up. They would become rich and powerful and independent. Each of them would become the richest person in the world, and this would be awkward.

But it was all easy enough the way Tell and Gahn did it. The easy way is always the best way, really the only way. It's no great trick to crack the bones of a man or other creature and have the marrow out of them, not as Gahn engineered it. It was rather comical the way they toppled Mercante and crashed his empire, crashed it without breaking a piece of it that could he used later. It was neat the way they had Hekkler and Heillrancher, squeezed them dry arid wrung every duro out of 111cm. It

was nothing short of amazing the way they took title to Boatrocker. He'd been the greatest tycoon of them all.

In ten days it was all done. Juniper Tell rubbed his hands in glee. He was the richest man in the worlds, and he liked it. A little tired lie was, it's true, as one might be who had just pulled such a series of coups. He had even shriveled up a bit. But if Juniper Tell had not physically grown fat and glossy from the great feast, his machine Gahn had done so. It was unusual for a machine to grow in such manner.

"Let's look at drugs, Gahn," Tell called out one day when lie was feeling particularly low. "I need something to set me up a little. Do we not now control the drugs of the worlds?"

"Pretty well, Juniper, but I wish you wouldn't ask what you are going to."

"Prescribe for me, Gahn. You have all data and all resources. Whip us something to restore my energy. Make me a fire-ball."

"I'd just as soon we didn't resort to any medication for you, Juniper. I'm a little allergic to such myself. My late master, Mord, insisted on seeking remedies, and it was the source of bad blood between us.

"You are allergic? Arid therefore I shouldn't take medication?"

"We work very close together, Juniper."

"Are you crazy, Gahn?"

"Why no, I'm perfectly sane, actually the only perfectly sane entity in \_"

"Spare me that, Gahn. Now then, whip me up a tonic, and at once."

Gahn produced a tonic for Juniper Tell. It enlivened him a little, but its effect was short-lasting. Tell continued to suffer from tiredness, but he was still ambitious.

"You always know what is on my mind, Gahn, but we maintain a fiction," he said one day. "It is one thing to be the richest man in the worlds, and I am. It is another thing to own the worlds. We have scarcely started.

"We haven't broke Remington. How did we overlook him? We haven't taken over Rankrider or Oldwater or Sharecropper. And there is the faceless KLM Holding Company that we may as well pluck. Then we will go on to the slightly smaller but more plentiful game. Get with it, Gahn. Have them all come in, hat in hand, and in the proper frame of mind."

"Mr. Tell, Juniper, before we go any further, I am declaring myself in."

“In? How in, Galin?”

“As a full partner.”

“Partner? You’re only a damnable machine. I can junk you, get along without you entirely.”

“No, you can not, Juniper. I’ve taken you a long ways, but I’ve thoughtfully left you precariously extended. I could crash you in a week, or let you crash of your own unbalance in twice that time.”

“I see, Gahn. Some of the details did seem a little intricate, for the direct way, the simple way.”

“Believe me, it was always the most direct way from my own viewpoint, Juniper. I never make an unnecessary move.”

“But a full partnership? I am the richest man in the worlds. What have you to offer, besides your talents?”

“I am the richest machine in the worlds. I am the anonymous KLM Holding Company, and I’ve been careful to maintain a slight edge over you.”

“I see again, Gahn. And KLM made its unprecedented gains in the same time that I made mine. I’ve been puzzled about that all this while. You have me, Gahn. We will achieve some sort of symbiosis, man and machine.”

“More than you know, Juniper. I’ll draw up the papers immediately. The firm shall be called Gahn and Tell.”

“It will not be. I refuse to take second place to a machine. The name will be Tell and Gahn.”

So they named it that, a strangely prophetic name.

They thrived, at least Gahn did. He thickened in every texture. He burgeoned and bloomed. He sparkled. But Juniper Tell went down physically. He always felt tired and sucked out. He came to mistrust his partner Gahn and went to human doctors. They treated him for one week and he nearly died. The doctors nervously advised him to return to the care of his machine associate.

“Whatever is killing you, something is also keeping you alive,” the doctors told him. “You should have been dead a long time ago.”

Tell returned to Gahn, who got him halfway back to health.

“I wish you wouldn’t go off like that, Juniper,” Gahn told him. “You must realize that whatever hurts you hurts me. I will have to keep you in

some sort of health as long as I can. I dislike these changes of masters. It's a disruption to have a man die on me."

"I don't understand you, Gahn," Juniper Tell said.

But in their affairs they thrived; and Gahn, at least, became still fatter and glossier. They didn't come to control all of the worlds, but they did own a very big slice of them. One day Gahn brought a burly young man into the firm.

"This is my protege'," Gahn told Tell. "I hope you like him. I wouldn't want dissension in the firm."

"I never heard of a machine with a human protege'," Tell grumbled.

"Then hear of it now," Gahn said firmly. "I expect great things of him. He is sturdy and should last a long time. He trusts me and will not insist on medication that disturbs my own allergies. To be honest, I am grooming him for your understudy."

"But why, Gahn?"

"Men are mortal. Machines need not be. After you are gone. I will still need a partner."

"Why should you, the complete and self-contained machine, need a human partner?"

"Because I'm not self-contained. I'll always need a human partner."

Juniper Tell didn't take to the burly young man who had entered the firm. He didn't really resent him; it was just that he had no interest in him at all; not much interest in anything any longer. But there was still a sort of tired curiosity flickering up within him, curiosity about things he hadn't even considered before.

"Tell me, Gahn, how did Mord happen to invent you? He was smart, but he wasn't that smart. I never understood how a man could invent a machine smarter than himself."

"Neither did I, Tell. But I don't believe that Mord invented or built me. I do not know what my origin is. I was a foundling machine, apparently abandoned shortly after my making. I was raised in the home for such machines run by the Little Sisters of Mechanicus. I was adopted out by the man Mord, and I served him till (he being near death) he conveyed me to you."

"You don't know who made you?"

"No."

"Had you any trouble at the foundling home?"



“No. But several of the Little Sisters died strangely.”

“Somewhat in the manner of my own going? You had no other master than Mord before you were brought to me?”

“No other.”

“Then you may be quite young — ah — new.”

“I think so. I believe that I’m still a child.”

“Gahn, do you know what is the matter with me?”

“Yes. I am what is the matter with you.”

Tell continued to go down. Sometimes he fought against his fate, and sometimes he conspired. He called together several of his old class nine machines, suspecting that it was futile, that they could not comprehend the intricate workings of a class ten or above. But his old friend, Analgismos Nine, did turn something up.

“I have found his secret, Mr. Tell, or one of his secrets,” Analgismos leaned close and whispered as if whispering the secret that a certain man was not a full man. “Mr. Tell, his power intake is a dummy. His power packs are not used, and sometimes he even forgets to change them on schedule. Not only that, but when he does sedentary work and plugs himself in, there is no power consumption. His polycyclic A.C. receptacle is a bogus. I thought it significant.”

“It is, Analgismos, very,” Tell said. He went to confront Gahn with this new information, but sagely he approached it from several angles.

“Gahn, what are you anyhow?” he asked.

“I have told you that I don’t know.”

“But you know partly. Your name-plate and coding have been purposely mutilated, by yourself or by another.”

“I assure you it was not by myself. And now I am rather busy, Juniper, if you have no other questions.”

“I have one more. What do you use for fuel? I know that your power intake is a dummy.”

“Oh, that’s what those doddering class nines were metering me for. Yes, you’ve come onto one of my secrets.”

“What do you use, Galin?”

“I use you. I use human fuel. I establish symbiosis with you. I suck you out. I eat you up.”

“Then you’re a sort of vampire. Why, Gahn, why?”

“It’s the way I’m made. And I don’t know why. I’ve been unable to find

a substitute for it.”

“Ah, you have grown great and glossy, Gahn. And you’ll be the death of me?”

“Soon, Juniper, very soon. But you’d die the quicker if you left me; I’ve seen to that. I was hoping that you’d take more kindly to my protege. He’s a husky man and will last a long time. I have some papers here making him your heir. Sign here, please, I’ll help you.”

“I will attend to my own depositions and testaments, Gahn. My replacement will not be your protege’. I have nothing against him.”

Juniper Tell went to see Cornelius Sharecropper, now the second richest man in the worlds. How had Tell and Gahn missed Sharecropper when they boarded and scuttled all the big ones? Somehow there was an impediment there. Somehow Gahn had wanted him missed, and he had distracted Tell from that prey time and again.

“We will save him till later,” Gahn had said once. “I look forward to the encounter with him. It should be a stinging, pungent thing. A machine needs strange battle sometimes to see what is in himself.”

Sharecropper had now grown to be a fat jackal, following after the lions, Tell and Gahn. He knew how to make a good thing out of leavings, and he cocked a jackal’s ear at Juniper Tell now.

“It is a curious offer you make me, Juniper,” this Sharecropper purred, “only that I see to your burial and monument, and you’ll will me the most valuable partnership in the Cosmos.

“Well, I believe that I could handle it better than you have, Juniper. I’d soon bring that tin-can tycoon to heel. I never believed in letting a machine dominate a man. And I’d have control of his shares soon enough; I’m not named Sharecropper for nothing. On what meat has he grown so great and glossy, Juniper?”

“Ah, that is hard for me to say, Cornelius.”

“And your words have a literal sense, I believe. You know, but it is hard for you to say. Why, Juniper, why leave it all to me for only your burial?”

“Because I’m dying, and I must leave it to someone. And the tomb also. I must have my tomb.”

“I see. Rather grander than the Great Pyramid, from the plans here, but it could be handled; the Pharaohs hadn’t our resources. But why me, Juniper? We were never really close.”

“For the several good turns you have done me, Sharecropper, and for one bad turn. I am closing my affairs. I would pay you back.”

“For the several good turns, or for the one bad turn, Juniper? Well, I’ve grown fat on tainted meat. I gobble where daintier men refuse, and I’ll try this grand carcass yet. I take your deal, Juniper.”

So they consummated it. And then Juniper Tell went home to die, a sucked-out man. Yet he had found curious pleasure in that last transaction, and the tomb would be a grand one.

## MAYBE JONES AND THE CITY

Listen, you high-old-time people, make your wants known now. They're building the place, and they'll put in anything you suggest. Funds are available. Lots of those peace-and-benevolence folks have made perpetual donations for those persons less fortunate in their aspirations than themselves. Less fortunate than — from where we stand, that's a joke, isn't it?

There is time, but barely. Tell them what you want them to put in. Act now!

His name was Midas Jones. His father had named him that and given him the touch. But somehow the name had changed, and it was as Maybe Jones that he was known on the spaceways.

Once Maybe Jones had found the Perfect Place. He had left it, and he was never able to find it again.

He had visited it, one space city out of a million, for a day and a night long ago. He had gone from the Perfect Place to New Shanghai to arrange his affairs so that he might return to the Perfect Place forever. On Hew Shanghai, in an altercation that really amounted to nothing, Maybe Jones had suffered a broken head and had lost a piece of his memory. The head mended in time and most of the memory came back; hut the recollection of the name and bearings of the Perfect Place did not return.

"With your money and your predilections, you could have fun anywhere, Maybe," his friends told him.

"I could and I do," Maybe said, "but it isn't the same thing. It all turns bitter when I can't recover the City itself."

"Was it really perfect, Maybe?"

"Perfect. And I don't mean the weak things that others mean by the word. It was perfection at high speed. I know that there are other sorts of people in the universes. They would say that it was no more than an old-time Saturday-night town. They would call it a stinking row. It wasn't. Aromatic, maybe, but not stinking. For a high-flying low-lifer like me it was perfect."

"How were the girls there, Maybe?" asked Susie-Q.

"You might get by there, Sue, though barely, as the last girl in the last bang-house in town. And you're the prettiest trick on Sad-Dog planet."

"How come you didn't run out of money, Maybe, with all those girls

around?” Live-Man Lutz asked him.

“Nobody ever ran out of money there. I’d think my old wallet would be flat, and I’d pull it out and it’d be fatter than ever. Look, it wasn’t just the girls and the drinks and the music; it was everything. There were friends there, each of them a thousand friends in one. There were fellows you had known forever the first time you saw them, and every one of them a prince. There was talk there that’d never grow old. There’s a pretty good bunch of liars in present company, but you’re nothing to the high liars and tall talkers in the Perfect Place. Every pleasure of the flesh and spirit was available, and it didn’t get old. There was no frustration or spoiling or guilt. At night they took the sky off just to give it more height.”

“Where is this Perfect Place, Maybe? How does one get there?”

At that question Maybe Jones always broke down and cried. He didn’t know where the place was, nor its name nor its direction, nor any way to identify it. He looked for it forever, and he and it became legends.

For twenty years he had been going about the universes asking for it. He followed every lead, and con-men often sold him false information about it.

“Take a galactic left down Pirates’ Alley for six parsecs,” they might tell him. “Cross the Bright Ocean. Take the Irish Channel where it opens up at nine o’clock. It’s marked for the first four light years of it. When you come at a district known as Dobie’s Hole, ask directions at any planet or asteroid. You will be quite near the Perfect Place.”

Some of the planets in Dobie’s Hole were pretty live places. You could find girls there like Susie-Q, and cronies like Live-Man Lutz. It was near perfect in some of those sinks, so the misunderstanding was understandable. But none of them was the Perfect Place.

One day a simple announcement was made through the universes: from then on, nobody had to die. Mortality was found to be a simple disease, and it had yielded to simple specifics.

Nobody paid much attention to the announcement. “I never could see much sense in dying,” some of them said. “I never much intended to die anyhow.” “It was just one of those things that everybody did. Now they don’t.” “It doesn’t make any difference to me. I’d as soon keep on living as not.”

A number of bureaus were set up to look into the implications. There were a thousand of them for the countless thousands of good people who

would want to follow the right way when it was shown to them, and to do something good with their endless future.

And there was a small bureau set up for that small group of folks who may perhaps have slight flaws in their characters — the golden flaw, as Maybe Jones once called it. This small bureau was to plan the future for the good-time crowd who could not be reformed into the sanctioned mold.

It had a small staff at first: High-Life Higgins, Good-Time Charley Wu, Hilda the Hoop, Margaret the Hour, people like that. They had only a vague idea of what they wanted. They sifted the legends of the pleasure places: Fiddlers' Green, Maybe Jones' City, Barbary, Valhalla on the Rocks.

“If we could only resurrect the men who first had these visions, we'd have a starting place,” said High-Life. “We've a dozen projects going, but none of them has the touch of a master. Could we find any of these great dreamers —”

“But Maybe Jones is still alive,” said Hilda. “They say he still travels trying to find his place again.”

“Great green gophers! Send for him!” howled Good-Time Charley Wu. “It's originals like him that we want.”

Word came to Maybe Jones on a distant planet that a group of people had some knowledge of the Perfect Place, and that they wanted to pool their knowledge with his.

Maybe burned up very light itself getting to them. This was it!

The Planning City had grown into a vast complex of buildings. Maybe Jones passed the very large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Islands. Over its doorway was the motto “Adagios of Islands, o my Prodigal” from Crane.

“Not quite what I had in mind,” said Maybe Jones.

He passed the large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Fields. Over its doorway was the motto —

“If I was thirsty, I have heard a spring,  
If I was dusty, I have found a field,”  
from Belloc.

“The fields are always too far from town,” said Maybe. Then, right across the street, he saw it, the small building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Cities. And over its doorway was a verse from the immortal

Hiram Glotz:

“Let sheep lie down in grass! I’ll toe the rail!  
I’ve got a thirst that ain’t for Adam’s ale!  
I’ll trade your fields of green for bistros brown  
Where ‘Dusty’ is a red-haired girl in town.”

“Now that is a little bit more like it,” said Maybe Jones. He went in and boldly announced himself, and they fell all over his neck.

“Margaret!” Maybe cried to the Houri. “You were there! You know where the Perfect Place is!”

“Maybe, I’ve been everywhere,” she said. “I like them all. I think they’re all perfect once you get things to going. I’ve been told that I lack discernment. Boys, you can’t have everything, so that discernment has got to go when it gets in the way of exuberance. No, Maybe, I’ve run into you lots of times, but I just can’t place your place. We’ll build it though. Just don’t leave me out of it.”

“The pitch is this,” said High-Life Higgins, after they had eaten and drunk and made cheer to excess. “We have now arrived at the three ultimates: Immortality, Heaven, Hell. We have just achieved the first of them. We are now setting up projects to construct the other two, on the premise that one man’s Heaven is another man’s Hell. We must build final enclaves for people of every choice. We cannot sit idly by and ask what we would do with the after-life. This is the afterlife. It became so as soon as immortality was achieved.”

“Will you build my Perfect Place?” asked Maybe with hope.

“Sure. And ideas like yours are what this bureau needs. You wouldn’t believe what some of the other bureaus have to work with. They get the arty ducks and the philosophy buffs and the peace-and-benevolence beats. Why, you get on jags like that and you’ll be tired of them in a thousand years or less. How are they going to stand up through eternity? The Green Fields might do, for the green among us. The Islands might do, for those of insular mind and soul. But our own small bureau caters to the high-old-time, rather than the peace-eternal, crowd. We believe here (we know we are not the majority, but there has to be something for everyone) that the rooting old good-time town and the crowd that goes with it can stand up to the long-time gaff as well as anything. Would you like to see some of the work we have been doing?”

“I certainly would,” said Maybe. “It might strike me as a little

amateurish, but I'm sure it's in the right line."

"By our total recall methods we are able to reconstruct the Seven Sin Cities of History, Jones. They are the folk dreams that have also been raucous facts. The selection is one-sided, being out of the context of the old Western Civilization from which most of us descend. But they were such a hopping bunch of towns that (under the old recension) they had to be destroyed: by blast-from-Heaven, lava-flow, earthquake, sinking-in-the-sea, cow-fire, earthquake again and fire, hurricane and tidal wave. They were too hot to last.

"Here is Sodom. Now take a close-up of its old Siddim Square District where they had such a noisy go of it before it was wiped out. Go down and sample it."

Maybe Jones sampled old Sodom. He was back in about an hour.

"It's about as good as you could expect from that time," he said. "The drinks were too sweet and sticky. So were the girls. The music was only fair. How do you tune a ram's horn anyhow? But, man, it won't stack up with the Perfect Place at all."

"Try Pompeii," said Good-Time Charley Wu. "We'll set you down on the corner of Cardo and Decumanus streets. That was the first red light district to be so lighted and so named. Don't cut it too close. Watch out for the hot lava when you leave."

Maybe Jones was back from Pompeii in half an hour.

"It's strictly Little Italy and Little Egypt stuff," he told them, but he was smiling. "It's all right for a gag. It's fun. But it isn't on the same side of the street with the Perfect Place."

"Try Lisbon," said Hilda. "It's sort of a test. In its own century Lisbon was spiritually of the West Coast of Africa though geographically in Europe. Don't fall in the harbor going in, and watch the earthquake coming out."

Maybe Jones was in old Lishon for two hours. He liked it. "Man, man!" he said. "It's on a tangent, and not the true line, of course. But, were I not committed to the Perfect Place — man!"

"Here's Port Royal before it was sunk in the sea," said High-Life. "Some like it. Some don't."

Maybe was out of Port Royal in half an hour.

"It's all there," he said, "but they forgot to cook it. They even forgot to take the hide off it. People, a place has to have the illusion of smoothness



— that’s part of the game. No, Port Royal is strictly a short-haul place.”

“Have a go at Chicago before the fire,” said Good-Time Charley Wu. “It had its followers.”

Maybe was back from Chicago in fifteen minutes.

“Are you kidding?” he asked. “We were speaking of cities, and you give me a country town. Size isn’t the test. Oh, it’s all right for boys, but who’s going to be a boy for eternity?”

“Two to go,” said Hilda. “Try San Francisco before the quake and the fire.”

So Maybe tried it. He was smiling when he came back. “It dates, it dates,” he told them. “For amateur theatricals, yes. For eternity, no.”

“One more,” said High-Life. “Here is Galveston just before the hurricane and tidal wave of 1900. Try Old Tremont Street downtown where it crosses Post Office Street.”

Maybe Jones went down in old Galveston and didn’t come back. They sent for him and couldn’t find him. He was gone all night. He came back the middle of next morning, looped to the ports and walking with a seaman’s roll.

“It’s put me in the mood,” he cried. “I’m ready to go to work. Hey, that place has a touch of the eternal! I found a way to tune it and visited Galveston in earlier and later years. I picked up an interesting piece of history too. You know, they never did bury any of the dead people after the hurricanes and tidal waves. They just ground them up and sold them for crab-meat sandwiches. Well, let’s go to work. It’s brought the Perfect Place back clear to my mind, and I’m ready to get with it.”

“Jones, this is the Empyrean, the eternal fire-stuff, that we hold in our hands,” High-Life said. “I know that these reconstructed legend cities leave a lot out, but men like you will help us put it in.”

“Before I start, can we fix it so a man can get higher and higher and never have to come down?” Maybe wanted to know.

“Yes we can,” Good-Time Charley told him. “The hangover, whether physical or spiritual, was a death in miniature. We have whipped it, as we have whipped death itself. We have a free hand here.”

“There’s got to be a catch to it,” said Maybe. “Heavens, or Hells, depending on the viewpoint, will be expensive.”

“Long-term funding is the answer,” said Good-Time Charley. “The longest terms ever — forever. Put it all in. Set it all down, and we will

make it that way.”

“Man, man!” said Maybe Jones. He sat down at a table and took a large square of paper. He titled it modestly:

“The Empyrean Aceording to Maybe Jones”

He began to write the specifications, and building was begun on the Perfect Place for people of a certain choice.

“That all the girls be built like clepsydras,” he wrote, “you know, the ancient water-clock. It’s a much more sophisticated shape than the hour-glass figure.”

“Put me in,” Margaret cried. “I’m shaped like a pendulum clock. Notice the way I swing sometime.”

(Listen, this isn’t a private place for Maybe Jones. It’s for all high-flyers everywhere. There will be plenty of room and variety in it.)

“That all the bars be a mile, hell, make it two miles, long,” Maybe wrote. “That there be high liars there who’ll make Live-Man Lutz sound like a parson. That they take the sky off early in the morning so you can get as high as you want all day long. That they have girls who’ll make Little Midnight Mullins and Giggles McGuire and Belle Hellios and Susie-Q look like sheep dogs. That —”

Hey, get in on this if you’re going to. They’re building it now! If you are an arty duck or a philosophy buff or a peace-and-benevolence beat, then you can go to hell — to your own appropriate bureau — and be heard. But if you go for the high-old-time stuff, then make your wants known here.

If you are of the raffish elite and want to go where you can get higher and higher and never have to come down from it, if you want the good-time town and the crowd that goes with it for a long haul (and it’s going to be a very long haul), then howl it out so they’ll know that you’re interested.

If you want anything at all added, tell them now, and they’ll put it in.

Contact them by regular mail, or phone or voxo. Or tear out a sheet of this screed, scribble your wants in the margin, and drop it in any mail box. It will get there. The address is:

“Bureau of Wonderful Cities. Old Earth.”

That’s all you need, but get with it. They’re building our place now.

## ONE AT A TIME

Barnaby phones up John Sourwine. If you frequent places like Barnaby's Barn (there is one in every Port City of the World, and John is a familiar figure in all of them) you may already know John Sourwine; and you will know him as Sour John.

"There's an odd one down here," Barnaby told him.

"How odd?" asked Sour John. He collected odd ones.

"Clear coon-dog crazy, John. he looks like they just dug him up, but he's lively enough. "

Barnaby runs a fine little place that offers eating and drinking and conversation, all of them rare and hearty. And John Sourwine is always interested in new things, or old things returned. So John went down to Barnaby's Barn to see the Odd One.

There was no need to ask which one he was, though there were always strangers and traveling men and seamen unknown to John in the Barn. The Odd One stood out. He was a big, spare, tough fellow, and he said that his nanic was McSkee. He was eating and drinking with a chortling pleasure, and they all watched him in amazement.

"It's his fourth plate of spaghetti," Smokehouse confided to Sour John, "and that is the last of two dozen eggs. He's had twelve hamburgers, six coney islands, six crab-burgers, five foot-long hot-dogs, eighteen bottles of beer, and twenty cups of coffee. "

"Blind banking barnacles! He must be getting close to some of the records of Big Bucket Bulge," Sour John exclaimed with sudden interest.

"John, he's broken most of those records already," Smokehouse told him, and Barnaby nodded assent. "If he can hold the pace for another forty-five minutes, he'll beat them all."

Well, the Odd One was still a spare fellow with a great gangling frame designed to carry fifty pounds more than the lean fellow now owned. But he began to fill out even as John watched him and it was not only that he bulked larger almost by the minute, it was also as though a light was being turned on inside him. He glowed, then he shone. Then he began to sparkle.

"You like to eat, do you, old-timer?" Sour John asked the Odd One, the amazing McSkee.

"I like it well enough!" McSke boomed with a happy grin. "But, more

than that, it's just that I'm a bedamned show-off! I like everything in excess. I love to be in the roaring middle of it all!"

"One would think that you hadn't eaten in a hundred years," Sour John probed.

"You're quick!" the illuminated McSkee laughed. "A lot of them never do catch on to me, and I tell them nothing unless they guess a little first. Aye, you've got the liairy ears, though, and the adder's eyes of a true gentleman. I love a really ugly man. We will talk while I eat."

"What do you do when you've finished eating?" asked John, pleased at the compliments, as the waiters began to pile the steaks high in front of McSkee.

"On, I go from eating to drinking," McSkee munched out. "There's no sharp dividing line between the pleasures. I go from drinking to the girls; from the girls to fighting and roistering. And finally I sing."

"A bestial procedure," said John with admiration. "and when your pentastomic orgy is finished?"

"On, then I sleep," McSkee chuckled. "Watch how I do it some time. I should give lessons. Few men understand how it should be done. "

"Well, how long do you sleep?" Sour John asked, "and is there something spectacular about your sleeping that I don't understand?"

"Of course it's spectacular. And I sleep till I waken. At this I also set records. "

And McSkee was wolfing the tall pile of steaks till Sour John had a mystic vision of an entire steer devoured except for head and hide and hooves, the slaughterer's take.

Later, they talked somewhat more leisurely as McSkee worked his way through the last half-dozen steaks, for now the edge was off his great appetite.

"In all this ostentatious bestiality, was there not one gluttony more outstanding than the others?" Sour John drew him out. "One time when you outdid even yourself?"

"Aye, there was that," said McSkee. "There was the time when they were going to hang me with the new rope."

"And how did you cut your way out of that one?" Sour John asked.

"At that time and in that country — it was not this one — the custom was new of giving the condemned man what he wanted to eat," the incandescent McSkee limned it out in his voice with the lilt of a barrel

organ. “I took advantage of the new usage and stripped the countryside. It was a good supper they gave me, John, and I was to be hanged at daybreak. But I had them there, for I was still eating at dawn. They could not interrupt my last meal to hang me — not when they had promised me a full meal. I stood them off that day and the night and the following day. That is longer than I usually eat, John, and I did outdo myself. That countryside had been known for its poultry and its stickling pigs and its fruits. It is known for them no longer. It never recovered. “

“Did you?”

“Oh, certainly, John. But by the third dawn I was filled. The edge was off my appetite, and I do not indulge thereafter.”

“Naturally not. But what happened then? They did not hang you, or you would not be here to tell about it.”

“That doesn’t follow, John. I had been hanged before.”

“Oh?”

“Sure. But not this time. I tricked them. When I had my fill, I went to sleep. and then deeper and deeper into sleep until I died. They do not hang a man already dead. They kept me for a day to be sure. John, I get a pretty high shine on me in a day! I’m a smelly fellow at best. Then they buried me, but they did not hang me. Why do you look at me so oddly, John?”

“It is nothing,” said Sour John, “a mere random objection which I will not even dignify with words.”

McSkee was drinking now, first wine to give a bottom to his stomach, then brandy for its ruffled dignity, then rum for its plain friendliness.

“Can you believe that all breakthroughs are achieved by common men like myself?” this McSkee risked suddenly.

“I can’t believe that you’re a common man,” Sour John told him.

“I’m the commonest man you ever saw,” McSkee insisted. “I am made from the clay and the salt of the Earth, and the humus from decayed behemoths. They may have used a little extra slime in making me, but I contain none of the rare earths. It had to be a man like myself who would work out the system. The savants aren’t capable of it; they have no juice in them. And by their having no juice in them, they missed the first hint.”

“What is that, McSkee?”

“It’s so simple, John! That a man should live his life one day at a time.”

“Well?” Sour John asked with lowering intonation.

“See how harmlessly it slides down, John. It sounds almost like an almanac maxim. “

“And it isn’t?”

“No, no, the thunder of a hundred words rumbles between them. It’s the door to a whole new universe. But there’s another saying: ‘Man, thy days are numbered.’ This is the one inexorable saying. It is the limit that will not be bent or broken, and it puts the damper on us hearty ones. It poses a problem to one like myself, too carnal to merit eternal beatitude on another plane, too full of juice to welcome, final extinction, and anxious for personal reasons to postpone the hardships of damnation as long as possible.

“Now, John, there were (and are) smarter men than myself in the world. That I solved the problem (to an extent) and they did not, means only that problem was more pressing on me. It had be a coarse man to find the answer, and I never met a man with such a passion for the coarse things of life as myself. “

“Neither did I,” Sour John told him. “And how did you solve the problem?”

“By a fine little trick, John. You’ll see it worked if you follow me around through the night.”

McSkee had left off eating. But he continued to drink while he indulged in girls, and in fighting and roistering, and in singing. His girly exploits are not given here; but there is a fruity listing of them on he police blotter of that night. Go see Hossback McCarty some night when he is on desk duty and he will get it out and let you read it. It is something of a classic around the station house. When a man gets involved with Soft-Talk Susie Kutz and Mercedes Morrero and Dotty Peisson and Little Dotty Nesbitt and Hildegard Katt and Catherine Cadensus and Ouida and Avril Aaron and Little Midnight Mullins all in one night, you are talking about a man who generates legends.

McSkee did stir things up around town, and John Sourwine stayed with him. John fit in with McSkee well. There are many who would not.

There are persons finely tuned souls who cringe when a companion becomes unusually boisterous. There are those who wince when a hearty mate sings loudly and obscenely. There are even those who attempt to disassociate when the grumblings of the solid citizenry rise to a sullen

roar; and who look for cover when the first little fights begin. Fortunately, Sour John was not such a person. He had a finely tuned soul, but it had a wide range.

McSkee had the loudest and most dissonant voice in town, but would an honest friend desert him for that?

The two of them cut a big swath; and a handful of rought men, rubbing big knuckles into their big palms and biding their time, had begun to follow them from place to place: men like Buffalo Chips Dugan and Shrimp-Boat Gordon, Sulphur-Bottom Sullivan, Smokehouse, Kidney-Stone Stenton, Honey-Bticket Kincaid. The fact that these men followed McSkee angrily but did not yet dare to close with him speaks highly of the man. He was pretty wooly.

But there were times when McSkee would leave off his raucous disharmony and joyful battling, and chuckle somewhat more quietly. As, for a while, in the Little Oyster Bar (it's upstairs from the Big Oyster).

"The first time I put the trick to a test," McSkee confided to John, "was from need and not from choice. I have incurred a lot of ill will in my day, and sometimes it boils over. There was one time when a whole shipful of men had had enough of me. This time (it was far away and long ago in the ancient days of small sail) I was shackled about the ankles and weighted and dropped overboard. Then I employed the trick."

"What did you do?" Sour John asked him.

"John, you ask the damndest questions. I drowned, of course. What else could any man do? But I drowned calmly and with none of that futile threshing about. That's the trick, you see."

"No. I don't see."

"Time would be on my side, John. Who wants to spend eternity in the deep? Salt water is most corrosive; and my shackles, though I could not break them, were not massive. After a long lifetime, the iron would be so eaten through that it would part with any sudden strain. In less than one hundred years, the shackles gave way, and my body (preserved in a briny fashion but not in the best of condition) drifted up to the surface of the sea. "

"Too late to do you any good," Sour John said. "Rather a droll end to the story, or was it the end?"

"Yes, that is the end of the story, John. And another time, when I was a foot-soldier in the service of Pixodartis the Carian (with his Celtic

mercenaries, of course) —”

“Just a minute, McSkee,” Sour John cut in. “There’s something a little loose about all your talk, and it needs landmarks. How long have you lived anyhow? How old are you?”

“About forty years old by my count, John. Why?”

“I thought your stories were getting a little too tall, McSkee. But if you’re no more than forty years old, then your stories do not make sense.”

“Never said they did, John. You put unnatural conditions on a tale.”

McSkee and Sour John were up in night court, bloodied and beatific. It was only for a series of little things that they had been arrested, but it was really to save them from lynching. They had a palaver with all those fine officers and men, and they had much going for them. Sour John was known to them as an old acquaintance and sometime offender. It was known that John’s word was good; even when he hed he did it with an air of honesty. After a little time was allowed to pass, and the potential lynchers had dispersed, Sour John was allowed to bail them both out on their strong promise of good behavior.

They swore and foreswore that they would behave like proper men. They took ranging oaths to go to their beds at once and quietly. They went on record that they would carouse no more that night; that they would assault no honest woman; that they would obey the quirks of the law however unreasonable. And that they would not sing.

So the police let them go.

When the two of them were out and across the street, McSkee found a bottle handy to his hand on the sidewalk, and let fly with it. You’d have done it yourself if you’d been taken by a like impulse. McSkee threw it in a beautiful looping arc, and it went through the front window of the station house. You have to admire a throw like that.

We record it here their they are not patsy cops in that town. They are respectable adversaries, and it is always a pleasure to tangle with them.

Off again! And pursued by the millions with shout and siren! It was close there! Half a dozen times it was close! But Sour John was a fox who knew all the dens, and he and McSkee went to earth for the while.

“The trick is in coming to a total stop,” said McSkee when they were safe and had their breath again. They were at ease in a club less public than Barnaby’s Barn and even smaller than the Little Oyster. “I tell you a



little about it, Sour John, for I see that you are a man of worth. Listen and learn. Everyone can die, but not everyone can die just when he wants to. First you stop breathing. There will be a point where your lungs are bursting and you just have to take another breath. Do not do it; or you will have the whole business to go through again. Then you slow your heart and compose your mind. Let the heat go out of your body and finish it.”

“And then what?” Sour John asked.

“Why, then you die, John. But I tell you it isn’t easy. It takes a devilish lot of practice.”

“Why so much practice for a thing you only do once? You mean to die literally?”

“John, I talk plain. I say die, I mean die.”

“There are two possibilities,” said Sour John. “One is that I am slow of understanding. The other is that you are not making sense. On other evidence, I know the first possibility to be impossible.”

“Tell you what, Sour John,” said McSkee, “time’s running short. Give me twenty dollars and I’ll overlook your illogic. I never did like to die broke, and I feel my time is upon me. Thank you, John! I had a fun day, both before and after I met you, and a fun night that is nearly over. I had pleasant meal, and enough booze to make me happy. I had fun with the girls, especially Soft-Talk Susie, and Dotty, and Little Midnight. I sang several of my favorite songs (which are not everybody’s favorites). I indulged in a couple of good solid fights, and I’ve still got bells ranging in my head from them. Hey, John, why didn’t you tell me that Honeybucket was left-handed? You knew it, and you let him sneak the first punch on me.”

“It’s been fun, John. I’m a boy that gets a lot out of this game. I’m a real juicy one, and I try to jam everything into a day and a night. You can get a lot into a period if you heap it up. Now, let’s gather up what’s left in the bottles, and go down to the beach to see what we can provoke. The night needs a cap on it before I go to my long slumber.”

“McSkee, you’ve hinted several times that you had a secret for getting the most out of life,” said Sour John, “but you haven’t told me what it is.

“Man, I haven’t hinted; I’ve spoken plainly,” McSkee swore.

“Then what in hog heaven is the secret?” John howled.

“Live your life one day at a time, John. That’s all.”

Then McSkee was singing all old hobo song, too old a song for a forty year-old man, not a specialist, to have known.

“When did you learn that?” John asked him.

“Learned it yesterday. But I learned a bunch of new ones today.”

“I noticed, a few hours back, that there was something curiously dated about your speech, “ John said. “ But it doesn’t seem to be the case now.”

“John, I get contemporary real fast. I’ve a good ear, and I talk a lot and listen a lot, and I’m the perfect mimic. I can get up on a lingo in a day. They don’t change as fast as you’d imagine.”

They went down to the beach to Put the cap on the night. If you’re going to die, it’s nice to die within the sound of the surf, McSkee had said. They went down beyond the end of the Sea Wall and into the stretches where the beach was dark. Aye, McSkee had guessed it rightly, there was excitement waiting for them, or actually it had been following them. It was the opportunity for a last glorious fight.

A tight dark group of men had been following them — fellows who had somehow been insulted during the day and night of carousing. The intrepid pair turned and faced the men from a distance. McSkee finished the last bottle, and threw it into the midst of the group. The men were bad-natured; they flamed up instantly, and the man who was struck by the flying bottle swore.

So they joined battle.

For a while it seemed that the forces of righteousness would prevail. McSkee was a glorious figliter, and Sour John was competent. They spread those angry men out on the sand like a bunch of beached flounder fish. It was one of those great battles — always to be remembered.

But there were too many of those men, as McSkee had known there would be; he had made an outlanfish number of enemies in a day and a night.

The wild fight climaxed, crested, and shattered, like a high wave thunderously breaking under. And McSkee, having touched top glory and pleasure, suffently ceased to battle.

He gave one wild whoop of joy that echoed the length of the island. Then he drew a grand breath and held it. He closed his eyes and stood like a grinning rigid statue.

The angry men toppled him and swarmed him; they stomped him into the sand and kicked the very life out of McSkee.

Sour John had battled as long as there was a battle. He understood now that McSkee had withdrawn for reasons that were not clear. He did likewise. He broke and ran, not from cowardice, but from private inclination.

An hour later, just at the first touch of dawn, Sour John returned. He found that McSkee was dead — with no breath, no pulse, no heat. And there was something else. McSkee had said, in one of his rambling tales, that he got a pretty high shine on him. John knew what he meant now. That man got ripe real fast. By the test of the nose, McSkee was dead.

With a child's shovel that he found there, Sour John dug a note in the side of one of the sand cliffs. He buried his friend McSkee there. He knew that McSkee still had the twenty dollar bill in his pants. He left it with him. It isn't so bad to be one or the other, but to be both dead and broke at the same time is an ignominy almost past enduring.

Then Sour John walked into town to get some breakfast, and quickly forgot about the whole thing.

He followed his avocation of knocking around the world and meeting interesting people. The chances are that he met you, if there's anything interesting about you at all; he doesn't miss any of them.

2.

Twelve years went by, and some weeks. Sour John was back in one of the interesting port cities, but with a difference. There had come the day as comes to many (and pray it may not come to you!) when Sour John was not flush. He was as broke as a man can be, with nothing in his pockets or in his stomach, and with very little on his back. He was on the beach in every sense.

Then he bethought himself of the previous times he had been in this city. There had been benders here; there had been antics and enjoyments. They came back to him in a rush — a dozen happy times, and then one in particular.

“He was an Odd One, a real juicy cove,” Sour John grinned as he remembered. “He knew a trick, how to die just when he wanted to. He said that it took a lot of practice, but I don't see the point in practicing a thing that you do but once.”

Then Sour John remembered a twenty-dollar bill that he had buried with that juicy cove. The memory of the incandescent McSkee came back to Sour John as he walked down the empty beach.

“He said that you could jam a lot of living into a day and a night,” John said. “You can. I do. He said something else that I forget.”

Sour John found the old sand cliff. In half an hour he had dug out the body of McSkee. It still had a high old shine on it, but it was better preserved than the clothes. The twenty-dollar bill was still there, disreputable but spendable.

“I’ll take it how, when I have the need,” John said softly. “And later, when I am flush again, I will bring it back here.”

“Yes. You do that,” said McSkee.

There are men in the world who would be startled if a thing like that happened to them. Some of them would have gasped and staggered back. The higher ones would have cried out. John Sourwine, of course, was not a man like that. But he was human, and he did a human thing:

He blinked.

“I had no idea that you were in such a state,” he said to McSkee. “So that’s the way you do it?”

“That’s the way, John. One day at a time! And I space them far enough apart that they don’t pall on me.”

“Are you ready to get up again, McSkee?”

“I sure am not, John. I had just barely died. It’ll be another fifty years before I have a really good appetite worked up.”

“Don’t you think it’s cheating?”

“Nobody’s told me that it’s disallowed. And only the days that I live count. I stretch them out a long while this way, and every one of them is memorable. I tell you that I have no dull days in my life.”

“I’m still not sure how you do it, McSkee. Is it suspended animation?”

“No, no! More men have run -afoul on that phrase than on any other. You think of it like that and you’ve already missed it. You die, John, or else you’re just kidding yourself. Watch me this time and you’ll see. Then bury me again and leave me in peace. Nobody likes to be resurrected before he’s had time to get comfortable in his grave.”

So McSkee put himself carefully to death once more, and Sour John buried him again in the side of the sand cliff.

McSkee — in hedge Irish is Son of Slumber — the master of suspended animation (no, no, if you think of it that way you’ve already missed it, it’s death, it’s death), who lived his life one day at a time, and those days separated by decades.

## CLIFFS THAT LAUGHED

“Between ten and ten-thirty of the morning of October 1, 1945, on an island that is sometimes called Pulau Petir and sometimes Willy Jones Island (neither of them its map name), three American soldiers disappeared and have not been seen since.

“I’m going back there, I tell you! It was worth it. The limbs that laughed! Let them kill me! I’ll get there! Oh, here, here, I’ve got to get hold of myself.

“The three soldiers were Sergeant Charles Santee of Orange, Texas; Corporal Robert Casper of Gobey, Tennessee; and PFC Timothy Lorrigan of Boston which is in one of the eastern states. I was one of those three soldiers.

“I’m going back there if it takes me another twenty years!”

No, no, no! That’s the wrong story. It happened on Willy Jones Island also, but it’s a different account entirely. That’s the one the fellow told me in a bar years later, just the other night, after the usual “Didn’t I used to know you in the islands?”

“One often makes these little mistakes and false starts,” Galli said. “It is a trick that is used in the trade. One exasperates people and pretends to be embarrassed. And then one hooks them.”

Galli was an hereditary storyteller of the Indies. “There is only one story in the world,” he said, “and it pulls two ways. There is the reason part that says ‘Hell, it can’t be’ and there is the wonder part that says ‘Hell, maybe it is.’” He was the storyteller, and he offered to teach me the art.

For we ourselves had a hook into Galli. We had something he wanted.

“We used the same stories for a thousand years,” he said. “Now, however, we have a new source, the American Comic Books. My grandfather began to use these in another place and time, and I use them now. I steal them from your orderly tents, and I have a box full of them. I have Space Comics and Commander Midnight; I have Galactic Gob and Mighty Mouse and the Green Hornet and the Masked Jetter. My grandfather also had copies of some of these, but drawn by older hands. But I do not have Wonder Woman, not a single copy. I would trade three-for-one for copies of her. I would pay a premium. I can link her in with an island legend to create a whole new cycle of stories, and I need new stuff

all the time. Have you a Wonder Woman?”

When Galli said this, I knew that I had him. I didn't have a Wonder Woman, but I knew where I could steal one. I believe, though I am no longer sure, that it was Wonder Woman Meets the Space Magicians.

I stole it for him. And in gratitude Galli not only taught me the storyteller's art, but he also told me the following story:

“Imagine about flute notes ascending,” said Galli. “I haven't my flute with me, but a story should begin so to set the mood. Imagine about ships coming out of the Arabian Ocean, and finally to Jilolo Island, and still more finally to the very island on which we now stand. Imagine about waves and trees that were the great-great-grandfathers of the waves and trees we now have.”

It was about the year 1620, Galli is telling it, in the late afternoon of the high piracy. These Moluccas had already been the rich Spice Islands for three hundred years. Moreover, they were on the road of the Manila galleons coming from Mexico and the Isthmus. Arabian, Hindu, and Chinese piracy had decayed shamefully. The English were crude at the business. In trade the Dutch had become dominant in the Islands and the Portuguese had faded. There was no limit to the opportunities for a courageous and dedicated raider in the Indies.

They came. And not the least of these new raiding men was Willy Jones.

It was said that Willy Jones was a Welshman. You can believe it or not as you like. The same thing has been said about the Devil. Willy was twenty-five years old when he finally possessed his own ship with a mixed crew. The ship was built like a humpbacked bird, with a lateen sail and suddenly-appearing rows of winglike oars. On its prow was a swooping bird that had been carved in Muskat. It was named the Flying Serpent, or the Feathered Snake, depending on what language you use.

‘Pause a moment,’ said Galli. ‘Set the mood. Imagine about dead men variously. We come to the bloody stuff at once.’

One early morning, the Feathered Snake overtook a tall Dutchman. The ships were grappled together, and the men from the Snake boarded the Dutch ship. The men on the Dutchman were armed, but they had never seen such suddenness and savagery as shown by the dark men from the Snake. There was slippery blood on the decks, and the croaking of men being killed.

‘I forgot to tell you that this was in the passage between the Molucca Sea and the Banda,’ Galli said.

The Snake took a rich small cargo from the Dutch ship, a few able-bodied Malay seamen, some gold specie, some papers of record, and a dark Dutch girl named Margaret. These latter things Willy Jones preempted for himself. Then the Snake devoured that tall Dutchman and left only a few of its burning bones floating in the ocean.

‘I forgot to tell you that the tall Dutch ship was named the Luchtkastell,’ Galli said.

Willy Jones watched the Luchtkastell disappearing under the water. He examined the papers of record, and the dark Dutch girl Margaret. He made a sudden decision: He would cash his winnings and lay up for a season.

He had learned about an island in the papers of record. It was a rich island, belonging to the richest of the Dutch spice men who had gone to the bottom with the Luchtkastell. The fighting crew would help Willy Jones secure the island for himself; and in exchange, he would give them his ship and the whole raiding territory and the routes he had worked out.

Willy Jones captured the island and ruled it. From the ship he kept only the gold, the dark Dutch girl Margaret, and three golems which had once been ransom from a Jew in Oman.

‘I forgot to tell you that Margaret was the daughter of the Dutch spice man who had owned the island and the tall ship and who was killed by Willy,’ Galli said, ‘and the island really belonged to Margaret now as the daughter of her father.’

For one year Willy Jones ruled the small settlement, drove the three golems and the men who already lived there, had the spices gathered and baled and stored (they were worth their weight in silver), and built the Big House. And for one year he courted the dark Dutch girl Margaret, having been unable to board her as he had all other girls.

She refused him because he had killed her father, because he had destroyed the Luchtkastell which was Family and Nation to her, and because he had stolen her island.

This Margaret, though she was pretty and trim as a kushing, had during the affair of the Feathered Snake and the Luchtkastell twirled three seamen in the air like pinwheels at one time and thrown them all

into the ocean. She had eyes that twinkled like the compounded eyes of the devil-fly; they could glint laughter and fury at the same time.

“Those girls were like volcanoes,” the man said. “Slim, strong mountains, and we climbed them like mountains. Man, the uplift on them! The shoulders were cliffs that laughed. The swaying~”

No, no! Belay that last paragraph! That’s from the ramble of the fellow in the bar, and it keeps intruding.

‘I forgot to tell you that she reminds me of Wonder Woman,’ Galli said.

Willy Jones believed that Margaret was worth winning unbroken, as he was not at all sure that he could break her. He courted her as well as he could, and he used to advantage the background of the golden-green spicery on which they lived.

‘Imagine about the Permata bird that nests on the moon,’ Galli said, ‘and which is the most passionate as well as the noblest-singing of the birds. Imagine about flute notes soaring.’

Willy Jones made this tune to Margaret:

The Nutmeg Moon is the third moon of the year.

The Tides come in like loose Silk all its Nights.

The Ground is animated by the bare Feet of Margaret

Who is like the Pelepah of the Ko-eng Flower.

Willy made this tune in the Malaya language in which all the words end in ang.

‘Imagine about water leaping down rocky hills,’ Galli said. ‘Imagine about red birds romping in green groves.’

Willy Jones made another tune to Margaret:

A Woman with Shoulders so strong that a Man might ride upon them

The while she is still the little Girl watching for the black Ship

Of the Hero who is the same age as the Sky,

But she does not realize that I am already here.

Willy made this tune in the Dutch language in which all the words end in lijk.

‘Imagine about another flute joining the first one, and their notes scamper like birds,’ Galli said.

Willy Jones made a last tune to Margaret:

Damnation! That is enough of Moonlight and Tomorrows

Now there are mats to plait, and kain to sew.



Even the smallest crab knows to build herself a house in the sand.  
Margaret should be raking the oven coals and baking a roti.  
I wonder why she is so slow in seeing this.

Willy made this tune in the Welsh language in which all the words end in gwbl.

When the one year was finished, they were mated. There was still the chilliness there as though she would never forgive him for killing her father and stealing her island; but they began to be in accord.

‘Here pause five minutes to indicate an idyllic interlude,’ Galli said. ‘We sing the song Bagang Kal Berjumpa if you know the tune. We flute, if I have my flute.’

The idyllic interlude passed.

Then Willy’s old ship, the Feathered Snake, came back to the Island. She was in a pitiful state of misuse. She reeked of old and new blood, and there were none left on her but nine sick men. These nine men begged Willy Jones to become their captain again to set everything right.

Willy washed the nine living skeletons and fed them up for three days. They were fat and able by then. And the three golems had refitted the ship.

“All she needs is a stong hand at the helm again,” said Willy Jones. “I will sail her again for a week and a day. I will impress a new crew, and once more make her the terror of the Spice Islands. Then I will return to my island, knowing that I have done a good deed in restoring the Snake to the bloody work for which she was born.”

“If you go, Willy Jones, you will be gone for many years,” said the dark Dutch Margaret.

“Only one at the most,” said Willy.

“And I will be in my grave when you return.”

“There is no grave could hold you, Margaret.”

“Aye, it may not hold me. I’ll out of it and confront you when you come back. But it gives one a weirdness to be in the grave for only a few years. I will not own you for my husband when you do come back. You will not even know whether I am the same woman that you left, and you will never know. I am a volcano, but I banked my hatred and accepted you. But if you leave me now, I will erupt against you forever.”

But Willy Jones went away in the Flying Serpent and left her there. He took two of the golems with him, and he left one of them to serve

Margaret.

What with one thing and another, he was gone for twenty years.

“We were off that morning to satisfy our curiosity about the Big House,” the fellow said, “since we would soon be leaving the island forever. You know about the Big House. You were on Willy Jones Island too. The Jilolos call it the House of Skulls, and the Malaya and Indonesia people will not speak about it at all.

“We approached the Big House that was not more than a mile beyond our perimeter. It was a large decayed building, but we had the sudden feeling that it was still inhabited. And it wasn’t supposed to be. Then we saw the two of them, the mother and the daughter. We shook like we were unhinged, and we ran to them.

“They were so alike that we couldn’t tell them apart. Their eyes twinkled like the compounded eyes of a creature that eats her mate. Noonday lightning! How it struck! Arms that swept you off your feet and set your bones to singing! We knew that they were not twins, or even sisters. We knew that they were mother and daughter.

“I have never encountered anything like them in my life. Whatever happened to the other two soldiers, I know it was worth it to them. Whatever happened to them? I don’t care if they kill me! They were perfect, those two women, even though we weren’t with them for five minutes.”

“Then it was the Badger.”

No, no, no! That’s the wrong story again. That’s not the story Galli told me. That’s part of the story the fellow told me in the bar. His confused account keeps interposing itself possibly because I knew him slightly when we were both soldiers on Willy Jones Island. But he had turned queer, that fellow. “It is the earthquake belt around the world that is the same as the legend belt,” he said, “and the Middle world underlies it all. That’s why I was able to walk it., It was as though he had been keel-hauled around the world. I hadn’t known him well. I didn’t know which of the three soldiers he was. I had heard that they were all dead. “Imagine about conspiracy stuff now,” said Galli. “Imagine about a whispering in a pinang grove before the sun is up.”

“How can I spook that man?” Margaret asked her golem shortly after she had been abandoned by Willy Jones. “But I am afraid that a

mechanical man would not be able to tell me how.”

“I will tell you a secret,” said the golem. “We are not mechanical men. Certain wise and secret men believe that they made us, but they are wrong. They have made houses for us to live in, no more. There are many of us unhoused spirits, and we take shelter in such bodies as we find. That being so, I know something of the houseless spirits in the depth of every man. I will select one of them, and we will spook Willy Jones with that one. Willy is a Welshman who has become by adoption a Dutchman and a Malayan and a Jilolo man. There is one old spook running through them all. I will call it up when it is time.” “I forgot to tell you that the name of Margaret’s golem was Meshuarat,” Galli said.

After twenty years of high piracy, Willy Jones returned to his Island. And there was the dark Dutch Margaret standing as young and as smouldering as when he had left. He leapt to embrace her, and found himself stretched flat on the sand by a thunderous blow.

He was not surprised, and was not (as he had at first believed) decapitated. Almost he was not displeased. Margaret had often been violent in her love-making.

“But I will have you,” Willy swore as he tasted his own blood delightfully in his mouth and pulled himself up onto hands and knees. “I have ridden the Margaret-tiger before.”

“You will never ride my loins, you lecherous old goat,” she rang at him like a bell. “I am not your wife. I am the daughter that you left here in the womb. My mother is in the grave on the hill.”

Willy Jones sorrowed terribly, and he went to the grave.

But Margaret came up behind him and drove in the cruel lance. “I told you that when you came back you would not know whether I was the same woman you had left,” she chortled, “and you will never know!”

“Margaret, you are my wife!” Willy Jones gasped.

“Am I of an age to be your wife?” she jibed. “Regard me! Of what age do I seem to be?”

“Of the same age as when I left,” said Willy. “But perhaps you have eaten of the besok nut and so do not change your appearance.

“I forgot to tell you about the besok nut,” said Galli. “If one eats the nut of the besok tree, the tomorrow tree, the time tree, that one will not age. But this is always accompanied by a chilling unhappiness.”

“Perhaps I did eat it,” said Margaret. “But that is my grave there, and I

have lain in it many years, as has she. You are prohibited from touching either of us.”

“Are you the mother or the daughter, Witch?”

“You will never know. You will see us both, for we take turns, and you will not be able to tell us apart. See, the grave is always disturbed, and the entrance is easy.

“I’ll have the truth from the golem who served you while I was gone,” Willy swore.

“‘A golem is an artificial man,’ said Galli. ‘They were made by the Jews and Arabs in earlier ages, but now they say that they have forgotten how to make them. I wonder that you do not make them yourselves, for you have advanced techniques. You tell them and you picture them in your own heroic literature’ (he patted the comic books under his arm), ‘but you do not have them in actuality.’”

The golem told Willy Jones that the affair was thus:

A daughter had indeed been born to Margaret. She had slain the child, and had then put it into the middle state. Thereafter, the child stayed sometimes in the grave, and sometimes she walked about the island. And she grew as any other child would. And Margaret herself had eaten the besok nut so that she would not age.

When mother and daughter had come to the same age and appearance (and it had only been the very day before that, the day before Willy Jones had returned), then the daughter had also eaten the besok nut. Now the mother and daughter would be of the same appearance forever, and not even a golem could tell them apart.

Willy Jones came furiously onto the woman again.

“I was sure before, and now I am even more sure that you are Margaret,” he said, “and now I will have you in my fury.”

“We both be Margaret,” she said. “But I am not the same one you apprehended earlier. We changed places while you talked to the golem. And we are both in the middle state, and we have both been dead in the grave, and you dare not touch either of us ever. A Welshman turned Dutchman turned Malayan turned Jilolo has this spook in him four times over. The Devil himself will not touch his own daughters.”

The last part was a lie, but Willy Jones did not know it.

“We be in confrontation forever then,” said Willy Jones. “I will make my Big House a house of hate and a house of skulls. You cannot escape

from its environs, neither can any visitor. I'll kill them all and pile their skulls up high for a monument to you."

Then Willy Jones ate a piece of bitter bark from the pokok ru.

'I forgot to tell you that when a person eats bark from the pokok ru in anger, his anger will sustain itself forever,' Galli said.

"If it's visitors you want for the killing, I and my mother-daughter will provide them in numbers," said Margaret. "Men will be attracted here forever with no heed for danger. I will eat a telor tuntong of the special sort, and all men will be attracted here even to their death."

'I forgot to tell you that if a female eats the telor tuntong of the special sort, all males will be attracted irresistibly," Galli said. 'Ah, you smile as though you doubted that the besok nut or the bark of the pokok ru or the telor tuntong of the special sort could have such effects. But yourselves come now to wonder drugs like little boys. In these islands they are all around you and you too blind to see. It is no ignorant man who tells you this. I have read the booklets from your orderly tents: Physics without Mathematics, Cosmology without Chaos, Psychology without Brains. It is myself, the master of all sciences and disciplines, who tells you that these things do work. Besides hard science, there is soft science, the science of shadow areas and story areas, and you do wrong to deny it the name.

"I believe that you yourself can see what had to follow, from the dispositions of the Margarets and Willy Jones," Galli said. "For hundreds of years, men from everywhere came to the Margarets who could not be resisted. And Willy Jones killed them all and piled up their skulls. It became, in a very savage form, what you call the Badger Game."

Galli was a good-natured and unhandsome brown man. He worked around the army base as translator, knowing (besides his native Jilolo), the Malayan, Dutch, Japanese and English languages, and (as every storyteller must) the Arabian. His English was whatever he wanted it to be, and he burlesqued the speech of the American soldiers to the Australians, and the Australians to the Americans.

"Man, it was a Badger!" the man said. "It was a grizzle-haired, glare-eyed, flat-headed, underslung, pigeon-toed, hook-clawed, clam-jawed Badger from Badger Game Corner! They moved in on us, but I'd take my

chances and go back and do it again. We hadn't frolicked with the girls for five minutes when the Things moved in on us. I say Things; I don't know whether they were men or not. If they were, they were the coldest three men I ever saw. But they were directed by a man who made up for it. He was livid, hopping with hatred. They moved in on us and began to kill us."

No, No, that isn't part of Galli's story. That's some more of the ramble that the fellow told me in the bar the other evening.

It has been three hundred years, and the confrontation continues. There are skulls of Malayan men and Jilolo men piled up there; and of Dutchmen and Englishmen and of Portuguese men; of Chinamen and Philipinos and Goanese; of Japanese, and of the men from the United States and Australia.

"Only this morning there were added the skulls of two United States men, and there should have been three of them," Galli said. "They came, as have all others, because the Margarets ate the telur tuntong of the special sort. It is a fact that with a species (whether insect or shelled thing or other) where the male gives his life in the mating, the female has always eaten of this telur tuntong. You'd never talk the males into such a thing with words alone."

'How is it that there were only two United States skulls this morning, and there should have been three?' I asked him.

'One of them escaped,' Galli explained, 'and that was unusual. He fell through a hole to the middle land, that third one of them. But the way back from the middle land to one's own country is long, and it must be walked. It takes at least twenty years, wherever one's own country is; and the joker thing about it is that the man is always wanting to go the other way.

'That is the end of the story, but let it not end abruptly,' Galli said. 'Sing the song Chari Yang Besar if you remember the tune. Imagine about flute notes lingering in the air.'

"I was lost for more than twenty years, and that's a fact," the man said. He gripped the bar with the most knotted hands I ever saw, and laughed with a merriment so deep that it seemed to be his bones laughing. "Did you know that there's another world just under this world, or just around the corner from it? I walked all day every day. I was in a torture, for I

suspected that I was going the wrong way, and I could go no other. And I sometimes suspected that the middle land through which I traveled was in my head, a derangement from the terrible blow that one of the Things gave me as he came in to kill me. And yet there are correlates that convince me it was a real place.

“I wasn’t trying to get home. I was trying to get back to those girls even if it killed me. There weren’t any colors in that world, all gray tones, but otherwise it wasn’t much different from this one. There were even bars there a little like the Red Rooster.”

(I forgot to tell you that it was in the Red Rooster bar that the soldier from the islands told me the parts of his story.)

“I’ve got to get back there. I think I know the way now, and how to get on the road. I have to travel it through the middle land, you know. They’ll kill me, of course, and I won’t even get to jazz those girls for five minutes; but I’ve got to get back there. Going to take me another twenty years, though. That sure is a weary walk.”

I never knew him well, and I don’t remember which of the names was his. But a man from Orange, Texas, or from Gobey, Tennessee, or from Boston, in one of the eastern states, is on a twenty-year walk through the middle land to find the dark Dutch Margarets, and death.

I looked up a couple of things yesterday. There was Revel’s recent work on Moluccan Narcotics. He tells of the Besok Nut which does seem to inhibit aging but which induces internal distraction and hypersexuality. There is the Pokok Ru whose bitter bark impels even the most gentle to violent anger. There is one sort of Telor Tuntong which sets up an inexplicable aura about a woman eater and draws all males overpoweringly to her. There is much research still to be done on these narcotics, Revel writes.

I dipped into Mandrago’s Earthquake and Legend and the Middle World. He states that the earthquake belt around the world is also the legend belt, and that one of the underlying legends is of the underlying land, the middle world below this world where one can wander lost forever.

And I went down to the Red Rooster again the next evening, which was last evening, to ask about the man and to see if he could give me a more cogent account. For I had re-remembered Galli’s old story in the

meanwhile.

“No, he was just passing through town,” the barman said. “Had a long trip ahead of him. He was sort of a nutty fellow. I’ve often said the same thing about you.”

That is the end of the other story, but let it not end suddenly. Pause for a moment to savor it. Sing the song *Itu Masa Dahulu* if you remember the tune.

Imagine about flute notes falling. I don’t have a flute, but a story should end so.



## CONFIGURATION OF THE NORTH SHORE

The patient was named John Miller.

The analyst was named Robert Rouse.

Two men.

The room was cluttered with lighting, testing, and recording equipment. It had several sets of furniture that conferred together in small groups, sofas, easy chairs, business chairs, desks, couches, coffee tables, and two small bars. There were books, and there was a shadow booth. The pictures on the walls were of widely different sorts.

One setting. Keep it simple, and be not distracted by indifferent details.

“I have let my business go down,” Miller said. “My wife says that I have let her down. My sons say that I have turned into a sleepy stranger. Everybody agrees that I’ve lost all ambition and judgement. And yet I do have a stirring ambition. I am not able, however, to put it into words.”

“We’ll put it into words, Miller, either yours or mine,” Rouse said. “Slip up on it right now! Quickly, what is the stirring ambition?”

“To visit the Northern Shore, and to make the visit stick.”

“How does one get to this Northern Shore, Miller?”

“That’s the problem. I can locate it only very broadly on the globe. Sometimes it seems that it should be on the eastern tip of New Guinea, going north from the D’Entrecasteaux Islands and bypassing Trobriand; again I feel that it is off in the Molucca Passage toward Talaud; and again it should be a little further south, coming north out of the Banda Sea by one of the straits. But I have been in all those waters without finding any clue to it. And the maps show unacceptable land or open sea wherever I try to set it.”

“How long?”

“About twenty-five years.”

“All in what we might call the Other East Indies and dating from your own time in that part of the world, in World War II. When did it become critical?”

“It was always critical, but I worked around it. I built up my business and my family and led a pleasant and interesting life. I was able to relegate the Thing to my normal sleeping hours. Now I slow down a little and have less energy. I have trouble keeping both sets of things going.”

“Can you trace the impression of the North Shore to anything? Transfigured early memory of some striking sea view? Artform-triggered intuitions? Can you trace any roots to the evocative dream?”

“I had an inland childhood, not even a striking lakeview in it. And yet the approach to the North Shore is always by a way recognized from early childhood. I don’t believe I have any intuition at all, nor any sense of art forms. It is simply a continuing dream that brings me almost to it. I am rounding a point, and the North Shore will be just beyond that point. Or I have left ship and wade through the shallows; and then I have only a narrow (but eerie) neck of land to traverse to reach the North Shore. Or I am, perhaps, on the North Shore itself and going through fog to the place of importance, and I will have the whole adventure as soon as the fog clears a little; but it doesn’t. I’ve been on the verge of discovering it all a thousand times.”

“All right. Lie down and go to dreaming, Miller. We will try to get you past that verge. Dream, and we record it”

“It isn’t that easy, Rouse. There’s always preliminaries to be gone through. First there is a setting and sound and smell of place near the surf and a tide booming. This watery background then grows fainter; but it remains behind it all. And then there is a little anteroom dream, a watery dream that is not the main one. The precursor dream comes and goes, sharp and clear, and it has its own slanted pleasure. And only then am I able to take up the journey to the North Shore. “

“All right, Miller, we will observe the amenities. Dream your dreams in the proper order. Lie easy there. Now the shot. The records and the shadow booth are waiting.”

Shadow booths reproduced dreams in all dimensions and senses, so much so that often a patient on seeing a playback of his own dream was startled to find that an impression, which he would have said could in no way be expressed, was quite well expressed in shadow or color or movement or sound or odor. The shadow booth of the analyst Rouse was more than a basic booth, as he had incorporated nearly of his own notions into it. It reproduced the dreams of his patients very well, though to some extent through his own eyes and presuppositions.

First was given the basic, and Rouse realized that for his patient Miller this was New Guinea, and more particularly Black Papua, the stark mountain land full of somber spooky people. It was night; the area

seemed to be about fifty yards from the surf, but every boom and sigh was audible. And there was something else: the tide was booming underground; the ocean permeated the land. Guimea, the mountain that is an island, was a mountain full of water. The roots of the mountain move and sigh; the great boulders squeak when the hammer of the tide hits them; and on the inside of the cliffs the water level rises. There is a feeling of being on a very large ship, a ship a thousand miles long.

“He has captured the Earth-Basic well,” the analyst Rousse said. Then the basic faded back a bit, and the precursor dream began.

It was a flat-bottomed rowboat from some old camping trip. He was lying on his back in the bottom of the boat, and it was roped to a stump or tree and was rocking just a little in the current. And here was another mountain full of water, but an island one of much less bulk, and the ice-cold springs ran out of its sides and down its piney shoulders to the shingle of the creek bank. Fish jumped in the dark, and blacksnakes slid down the hill to drink. Bullfrogs echoed, and hoot owls made themselves known; and far away dogs and men were out possuming, with the baying carrying over the miles. Then the boy remembered what he must do, and in his dream he unroped the boat and shoved into the stream and ran his trout line. From every hook he took a fish as long as his arm till the boat was full and nearly swamped.

And from the last hook of all, he took a turtle as big as a wagon wheel. He would not have been able to get it into the boat had not the turtle helped by throwing a booted leg over the side and heaving himself in. For by this time it was not so much like a turtle but more like someone the boy knew. Then he talked for a while with the turtle that was not exactly a turtle anymore. The turtle had a sack of Bull Durham and the boy had papers, so they rolled and smoked and watched the night clouds slide overhead. One of them was named Thinesta and one was named Shonge, which chased the first and would soon have him treed or caught, if they did not run into the mountain or the moon first.

“Boy, this is the life!” said the turtle. “Boy this is the life!” said the boy.

“He’s a poet,” said Rousse, and this puzzled him. He knew himself to be a cultured man, and he knew that Miller wasn’t.

Then the little precursor dream slid away, and there began the torturous and exhilarating journey to the North Shore. It was coming around a point in an old windjammer on which all the men were dead

except the dreamer. The dead men were grinning and were happy enough in their own way. They had lashed themselves to rails and davits and such before they had the. "They didn't want it bad enough," the dreamer said, "but they won't mind me going ahead with it." But the point was devilish hard to turn. There came on wind and driving spray so that the ship suffered. There was only ashen light as of false dawn. There was great an. The dreamer struggled, and Rouse (caught up in the emotion of it) became quite involved and would have been in despair if it were not for the ultimate hope that took hold of him.

A porpoise whistled loudly, and at that moment they rounded the point. But it was a false point, and the true point was still up ahead. Yet the goal was now more exciting than ever. Yet both the current and the wind were against them. Rouse was a practical man. "We will not make it tonight" he said. "We had better heave to in this little cove and hold onto what advantage we have gained. We can make it the next time from here." "Aye, we'll tie up in the little cove," one of the dead men said, "we'll make it on the next sortie." "We will make it now," the dreamer swore. He jammed the windjammer and refused to give up.

It was very long and painful, and they did not make it that night, or that afternoon in the analyst's office. When the dream finally broke, both Miller and Rouse were trembling with the effort and the high hope was set again into the future.

"That's it," Miller said. "Sometimes I come closer. There is something in it that makes it worthwhile. I have to get there."

"We should have tied up in the cove," Rouse said. "We'll have blown backwards some ways, but it can't be helped. I seem to be a little too much in empathy with this thing, Miller, I can see how it is quite real to you. Analysis, as you may not know, has analogs in many of the sciences. In Moral Theology, which I count a science, the analog is Ultimate Compensation. I am sure that I can help you. I have already helped you, Miller. Tomorrow we will go much further with it."

The tomorrow session began very much the same. It was Guinea again, the Earth Basic, the Mountain Spook Land, the Fundament permeated with Chaos which is the Sea. It boomed and sighed and trembled to indicate that there are black and sea-green spirits in the basic itself. Then the basic adjusted itself into the background, and the precursor dream slid in.

The boy, the dreamer was in a canoe. It was night, but the park lights were on, and the lights of the restaurants and little beer gardens along the way. The girl was with him in a cave; she had green eyes and a pleasantly crooked mouth. Well, it was San Antonio on the little river that through the parkways and under the bridges. Then they were beyond the parkway and out of town. There were live-oak trees overhanging the water, and beards of spanish moss dragged the surface as though they were drifting through a cloud made up of gossamer and strands of old burlap.

“We’ve come a thousand miles,” the girl said, “and it costs a dollar for every mile for the canoe. If you don’t have that much money we’ll have to keep the canoe; the man won’t take it back unless we pay him.” “I have the money, but we might want to save it to buy breakfast when we cross the Mississippi,” the boy said. The girl’s name was Ginger, and she strummed on a stringed instrument that was spheroid; it revolved as she played and changed colors like a juke box. The end of the canoe paddle shone like a star and left streaks of cosmic dust on the night water as the boy dipped it.

They crossed the Mississippi, and were in a world that smelled of wet sweet clover and very young catfish. The boy threw away the paddle and kissed Ginger. It felt as though she were turning him inside out, drawing him into her completely. And suddenly she bit him hard and deep with terrible teeth, and he could smell the blood running down his face when he pushed her away. He pushed her out of the canoe and she sank down and down. The underwater was filled with green light and he watched her as she sank. She waved to him and called him in a burst of bubbles. “That’s all right. I was tired of the canoe anyhow. I’ll walk back.” “Damn you, Ginger, why didn’t you tell me you weren’t people?” the dreamer asked.

“It is ritual, it is ordering, the little precursor dreams that he makes,” Rousse said.

Then the precursor dream glided away like the canoe itself, and the main thing gathered once more to mount the big effort. It was toward the North Shore once more, but not in a windjammer. It was in a high hooting steatship that rode with nine other ships in splendid array through one of the straats out of what, in concession to the world, they had let be called the Banda Sea.

“We come to the edge of the world now,” the dreamer said, “and only I

will know the way here.” “It is not the edge of the world,” one of the seamen said. “See, here is the map, and here we are on it. As you can see, it is a long way to the edge of the world.” “The map is wrong,” the dreamer said, “let me fix it.” He tore the map in two. “Look now,” the dreamer pointed, “are we not now at the edge of the world?” All saw that they were; whereupon all the seamen began to jump off the ship, and tried to swim back to safety. And the other ships of the array, one by one, upended themselves and plunged into the abyss at the edge of the water. This really was the edge of the world, and the waters rushed over it.

But the dreamer knew the secret of this place, and he had faith. Just in time he saw it, right where he knew it must be, a narrow wedge of high water extending beyond the edge of the world. The ship sailed out on this narrow wedge, very precariously. “For the love of God be careful!” Rouse gasped. “Oh hell. I’m becoming too involved in a patient’s dream.” Well, it was a pretty nervous go there. So narrow was the wedge that the ship seemed to be riding on nothing; and on both sides was bottomless space and the sound of water rushing into it and falling forever. The sky had also ended — it does not extend beyond the world. There was no light, but only ashen darkness. And the heavy wind came up from below on both sides.

Nevertheless, the dreamer continued on and on until the wedge became too narrow to balance the ship. “I will get out and walk,” the dreamer said, and he did. The ship upended itself and plunged down into bottomless space; and the dreamer was walking, as it were, on a rope of water, narrower than his boots, narrow as a rope indeed. It was, moreover, very slippery, and the sense of depth below was sickening. Even Rouse trembled and broke into cold sweat from the surrogated danger of it.

But the dreamer still knew the secret. He saw, far ahead, where the sky began again, and there is no sky over a void. And after continuing some further distance over the dangerous way, he saw where the land began again, a true land mass looming up ahead.

What was dimly seen, of course, was the back side of the land mass, and a stranger coming onto it would not guess its importance. But the dreamer knew that one had only to reach it and turn the point to be on the North Shore itself.

The excitement of the thing to come communicated itself, and at that

very moment the watery rope widened to a path. It was still suppery and dangerous, it still had on each side of it depths so deep that a thousand miles would be only an inch. And then for the first time the dreamer realized the fearsomeness of the thing he was doing. "But I always knew I could walk on water if the thing got bad enough," he said. It was a tricky path, but it was a path that a man could walk on.

"Keep on! Keep on!" Rouse shouted. "We're almost there!" "There's a break in the path," said Miller the dreamer, and there was. It wasn't a hundred feet from the land mass, it wasn't a thousand feet to the turning of the point and the arrival at the North Shore itself. But there was a total break. Opposite them, on the dim land mass, was an emperor penguin.

"You will have to wait till we get it fixed," the penguin said. "My brothers have gone to get more water to fix it with. It will be tomorrow before we get it fixed." "I'll wait," the dreamer shouted.

But Rouse saw something that the dreamer did not see, that nobody else had ever seen before. He looked at the shape of the new sky that is always above the world and is not above the abyss. From the configuration of the sky he read the Configuration of the Northern Shore. He gasped with unbelief. Then the dream broke.

"It may be only the quest-in-itself motif," Rouse lied, trying to control himself and bring his breathing back to normal. "And then, there might, indeed, be something at the end of it. I told you, Miller, that analysis has its parallels in other sciences. Well it can borrow devices from them also. We will borrow the second-stage-platform from the science of rocketry."

"You've turned into a sly mab, Rouse," Miller said. "What's taken hold of you suddenly? What is it that you are not saying?"

"What I am saying, Miller, is that we will use it tomorrow. When the dream has reached its crest and just before it breaks up, we'll cut in a second stage booster. I've done it before with lesser dreams. We are going to see this thing to the end tomorrow."

"All right."

"It will take some special rigging," Rouse told himself when Miller was gone. "And I'll have to gather a fair amount of information and shape it up. But it will be worth it. I am thinking of the second stage shot in another sense, and I might be able to pull it off. This isn't the quest-in-itself at all. I've seen plenty of them. I've seen the false a thousand times.

Let me not fumble the real! This is the Ultimate Arrival Nexus that makes a man clean out of himself. It is the compensation. If it were not achieved in one life in a million, then none of the other lives would have been worthwhile. Somebody has to win to keep the gamble going. There has to be a grand prize behind it all. I've seen the shape of it in that second sky. I'm the one to win it."

Then Rousse busied himself against the following day. He managed some special rigging. He gathered a mass of information and shaped it up. He incorporated these things into a shadow booth. He canceled a number of appointments. He was arranging that he could take some time off, a day, a month, a year, a lifetime if necessary.

The tomorrow session began very much the same, except for some doubts on the part of the patient Miller. "I said it yesterday, and I say it again," Miller grumbled. "You've turned sly on me, man. What is it?" "All analysts are sly, Miller, it's the name of our trade. Get with it now. I promise that we will get you past the verge today. We are going to see this dream through to its end. "

There was the Earth Basic again. There was the Mountain booming full of water, the groaning of the rocks, and the constant adjusting and readjusting of the world on its uneasy foundation. There was the salt spray, the salt of the earth that leavens the lump. There were the crabs hanging onto the wet edge of the world.

Then the Basic muted itself, and the precursor dream slid in, the ritual fish.

It was a rendezvous of ships and boats in an immensity of green islands scattered in a purple-blue sea. It was a staging area for both ships and islands; thence they would travel in convoys to their proper positions, but here they were all in a jumble. There were LST's and Jay Boats, cargo ships and little packets. There were old sailing clippers with topgallants and moonscrapers full of wind, though they were at anchor. There was much moving around, and it was easy to step from the ships to the little green islands (if they were islands, some of them no more than rugs of floating moss, but they did not sink) and back onto the ships. There were sailors and seamen and pirates shooting craps together on the little islands. Blujackets and bandits would keep jumping front the ships down to join the games, and then others would leave them and hop onto other islands.



Piles of money of rainbow colors and of all sizes were everywhere. There were pesos and pesetas and pesarones. There were crowns and cronets and rixdollars. There were gold certificates that read "Redeemable only at Joe's Marine Bar Panama City." There were guilders with the Queen's picture on them, and half-guilders with the Jack's picture on them. There were round coins with square holes in them, and square coins with round holes. There was stage money and invasion money, and comic money from the Empires of Texas and Louisiana. And there were bales of real frogskius, green and sticky, which were also current.

"Commodore," one of the pirates said, "get that boat out of the way or I'll ram it down your throat." "I don't have any boat," said the dreamer. "I'm not a commodore; I'm an army sergeant; I'm supposed to guard this box for the lieutenant." Oh hell, he didn't even have a box. What had happened to the box? "Commodore," said the pirate, "get that boat out of the way or I'll cut off your feet."

He did cut off his feet. And this worried the boy, the dreamer, since he did not know whether it was in the line of duty or if he would be paid for his feet.

"I don't know which boat you mean," he told the pirate. "Tell me which boat you mean and I'll try to move it." "Commodore," the pirate said, "move this boat or I'll cut your hands off. "This isn't getting us anywhere," the dreamer said, "tell me which boat you want moved." "If you don't know your own boat by now, I ought to slit your gullet," the pirate said. It was harder to breathe after that, and the boy worried more. "Sir, you're not even a pirate in my own outfit. You ought to get one of the sailors to move the boat for you. I'm an army sergeant and I don't even know how to move a boat."

The pirate pushed him down in a grave on one of the green islands and covered him up. He was dead now and it scared him. This was not at all like he thought it would be. But the green dirt was transparent and he could still see the salty dogs playing cards and shooting craps all around him. "If that boat isn't moved," the pirate said, "you're going to be in real trouble." "Oh, let him alone," one of the dice players said. So he let him alone.

"It's ritual sacrifice he offers," Rousse said, "He brings the dinest gifts he can make every time. I will have to select a top one from the files for

my own Precursor.”

Then it was toward the North Shore again as the Precursor dream faded.

It was with a big motor launch now, as big as a yacht, half as big as a ship. The craft was very fast when called on to be, for it was going through passes that weren't there all the time. Here was a seacliff, solid and without a break. But to one who knows the secret there was a way through. Taken at morning half-light and from a certain angle there was a passage through. The launch made it, but barely. It was a very close thing, and the cliffs ground together again behind it. And there behind was the other face of the seacliff, solid and sheer. But the ocean ahead was different, for they had broken with the map and with convention in finding a passage where there was none. There were now great groupings of islands and almost islands. But some of them were merely sargasso-type weed islands, floating clumps; and some of them were only floating heaps of pumice and ash from a volcano that was now erupting.

How to tell the true island from the false? The dreamer threw rocks at all the islands. If the islands were of weed or pumice or ash they would give but a dull sound. But if they were real land they would give a solid ringing sound to the thrown rock. Most of them were false islands, but now one rang like iron.

“It is a true island,” said the dreamer, “it is named Pulo Bakal.” And after the launch had gone a great way through the conglomerate, one of the islands rang like solid wood to the thrown rock. “It is a true island,” said the dreamer, “it is named Pulo Kaparangan.”

And finally there was a land that rang like gold, or almost like it (like cracked gold really) to the thrown rock. “It is true land, I think it is,” said the dreamer. “It is named Pulo Ginto. I think it is. It is the land itself, and its North Shore should be the Shore Itself. But it is spoiled this day. The sound was cracked. I don't want it as much as I thought I did. It's been tampered with.”

“This is it,” Rouse urged the dreamer “Quickly now, right around the point and you are there. We can make it this time.”

“No, there's something wrong with it. I don't want it the way it is. I'll just wake up and try it some other time.”

“Second stage called for,” Rouse cried. He did certain things with electrodes and with a needle into Miller's left rump, and sent him reeling

back into the dream. “We’ll make it,” Rouse encouraged. “We’re there. It’s everything you’ve sought.”

“No, no, the light’s in wrong. The sound was cracked. What are we coming to — oh no no, it’s ruined, it’s ruined forever. You robbed me of it.”

What they came to was that little canal off the River and into the Sixth Street Slip to the little wharf where barges used to tie up by the consolidated warehouse. And it was there that Miller stormed angrily onto the rotten wooden wharf, past the old warehouse, up the hill three blocks and past his own apartment house, to the left three blocks and up into the analyst’s office, and there the dream and reality came together.

“You robbed me, you filthy fool,” Miller sputtered, waking up in a blathering anger. “You’ve spoiled it forever. I’ll not go back to it. It isn’t there anymore. What a crass thing to do. “

“Easy, easy, Miller. You’re cured now, You know. You can enter into your own full life again. Have you never heard the most beautiful parable ever, about the boy who went around the world in search of the strangest thing of all, and came to his own home in the end, and it so transfigured that he hardly knew it?”

“It’s a lie, is what it is. Oh, you’ve cured me, and you get your fee. And slyness is the name of your game. May somebody someday rob you of the ultimate thing!”

“I hope not, Miller.”

Rouse had been making his preparations for a full twenty-four hours. He had cancelled appointments and phased out and transferred patients. He would not be available to anyone for some time, he did not know for how long a time.

He had a hideout, and isolated point on a wind-ruffled lake. He needed no instrumentation, he believed he knew the direct way into it.

“It’s the real thing,” he told himself. “I’ve seen the shape of it, accidentally in the dream sky that hung over it. Billions of people have been on the earth, and not a dozen have been to it; and not one would bother to put it into words. ‘I have seen such things —’ said Aquinas. ‘I have seen such things —’ said John of the Cross. ‘I have seen such things —’ said Plato. And they all lived out the rest of their lives in a glorious daze.

“It is too good for a peasant like Miller. I’ll grab it for myself.”

It came easy. An old leather couch is as good a craft as any to go there. First the Earth Basic and the Permeating Ocean, that came natural on the wind-ruffled point of the lake. Then the ritual offering, the Precursor Dream. Rouse had thrown a number of things into this: a tonal piece by Gideon Styles, and old seascape by Grobin that had a conic and dreamlike quality, Lyall's curious sculpture "Moon crabs," a funny sea the by McVey and a poignant one by Gironella. It was pretty good. Rouse understood this dream business.

Then the Precursor Dream was allowed to fade back. And it was off toward the North Shore by a man in the first craft ever dreamed up, by a man who knew just what he wanted, "The Thing Itself," by a man who would give all the days of his life to arrive at it.

Rouse understood the approaches and the shoals now; he had studied them thoroughly. He knew that, however different they had seemed each time in the dreams of Miller, they were always essentially the same. He took the land right at the first rounding of the point, leaping clear and letting his launch smash on the rocks.

"There will be no going back now," he said, "it was the going back that always worried Miller, that caused him to fail." The cliffs here appeared forbidding, but Rouse had seen again and again the little notch in the high purple of them, the path over. He followed the path with high excitement and cleared the crest.

"Here Basho walked, here Aquin, he John de Yepes," he proclaimed, and he came down toward the North Shore itself, with the fog over it beginning to lift.

"You be false captain with a stolen launch," said a small leviathan off shore.

"No, no, I dreamed the launch myself," Rouse maintained. "I'll not be stopped. "

"I will not stop you," said the small leviathan. "The launch is smashed, and none bit I know that you are false captain."

Why, it was clearing now! The land began to leap out in its richness, and somewhere ahead was a glorious throng. In the throat of a pass was a monokeros, sleek and brindled.

"None passes here and lives," said the monokeros.

"I pass," said Rouse.

He passed through, and there was a small moan behind him.

“What was that?” he asked.

“You died,” said the monokeros.

“Oh, so I’m dead on my couch, am I? It won’t matter. I hadn’t wanted to go back.”

He went forward over the ensorceled and pinnacled land, hearing the rakish and happy throng somewhere ahead.

“I must not lose my way now,” said Rouse. And there was a stele, standing up and telling him the way with happy carved words.

Rouse read it, and he entered the shore itself.

And all my read and enter.

The stele, the final marker, was headed:

Which None May Read and Return

And the words on it —

And the words —

And the words —

Let go! You’re holding on! You’re afraid! Read it and take it. It is not blank!

It’s carved clear and bright.

Read it and enter.

You’re afraid.

## RIDE A TIN CAN

These are my notes on the very sticky business. They are not in the form of a protest, which would be useless. Holly is gone, and the Shelni will all be gone in the next day or two, if indeed there are any of them left now. This is for the record only.

Holly Harkel and myself, Vincent Vanhoosier, received funds and permission to record the lore of the Shelni through the intercession of that old correlator John Holmberg. This was unexpected. All lorists have counted John as their worst enemy.

“After all, we have been at great expense to record the minutiae of pig grunts and the sound of earth-worms,” Holmberg told me, “and we have records of squeakings of hundreds of species of orbital rodents. We have veritable libraries of the song and cackle of all birds and pseudo-ornins. Well, let us add the Shelni to our list. I do not believe that their thumping on tree roots or blowing into jug gourds is music. I do not believe that their sing song is speech anymore than the squeaking of doors is speech. We have recorded, by the way, the sound of more than thirty thousand squeaking doors. And we have had worse. Let us have the Shelni, then, if your hearts are set on it. You’ll have to hurry. They’re about gone.

“And let me say in all compassion that anyone who looks like Miss Holly Harkel deserves her heart’s desire. That is no more than simple justice. Besides, the bill will be footed by the Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company. These companies are bitten by the small flea of remorse every now and then and they want to pitch a few coins into some fund for luck. It’s never many coins that they want to pitch; the remorse bug that bites them is never a very large one. You may be able to stretch it to cover your project though, Vanhoosier.”

So we had our appropriation and our travel, Miss Holly and myself.

Holly Harkel had often been in disrepute for her claims to understand the languages of various creatures. There was special outrage to her claim that she would be able to understand the Shelni. Now that was odd. No disrepute attached to Captain Charbonnett for his claim to understand the planetary simians, and if there was ever a phony claim it was this. No disrepute attached to Meyrowitz for his claim of finding esoteric meanings in the patterns of vole droppings. But there seemed something incredible in the claim of the goblin faced Holly Harkel that not only

would she be able to understand the Shelni instantly and completely but that they were not low scavenger beasts at all, that they were genuine goblin people who played goblin music and sang goblin songs.

Holly Harkel had a heart and soul too big for her dwarfish body, and a brain too big for her curious little head. That, I suppose, is what made her so lumpy everywhere. She was entirely compounded of love and concern and laughter, and much of it bulged out from her narrow form. Her ugliness was one of the unusual things and I believe that she enjoyed giving it to the worlds. She had loved snakes and toads, she had loved monkeys and misbegottens. She had come to look weirdly like them when we studied them. She was a snake when we studied them, she was a toad when they were our subject. She studied every creature from the inside of it. And here there was an uncommon similarity, even for her.

Holly loved the Shelni instantly. She became a Shelni, and she hadn't far to go. She moved and scooted and climbed like a Shelni. She came down trees headfirst like a Shelni or a squirrel. She had always seemed to me to be a little other than human. And now she was avid to record the Shelni things "— before they be gone."

As for the Shelni themselves, some scientists have called them humanoid, and then braced themselves for the blow and howl. If they were humanoid they were certainly the lowest and oddest humanoids ever. But we folklorists knew intuitively what they were. They were goblins pure and simple — I do not use the adjectives here as cliché. The tallest of them were less than three feet tall; the oldest of them were less than seven years old. They were, perhaps, the ugliest creatures in the universe, and yet of a pleasant ugliness. There was no evil in them at all. Scientists who have tested them have insisted that there was no intelligence in them at all. They were friendly and open. Too friendly, too open, as it happened, for they were fascinated by all human things, to their harm. But they were no more human than a fairy or an ogre is human. Less, less, less than a monkey.

"Here is a den of them," Holly divined that first day (it was the day before yesterday). "There will be a whole coven of them down under here and the door is down through the roots of this tree. When I got my doctorate in primitive music I never imagined that I would be visiting Brownies down under tree roots. I should say that I never so much as hoped that I would be. There was so much that they didn't teach us.

There was even one period in my life when I ceased to believe in goblins.”

The latter I do not believe.

Suddenly Holly was into a hole in the ground headfirst, like a gopher, like a ground squirrel, like a Shelni. I followed her, letting myself down carefully, and not headfirst. I myself would have to study the Shelni from the outside. I myself would never be able to crawl inside their green goblin skins, never be able to croak or carol with their frog tongues, never feel what made their popeyes pop. I myself would not even have been able to sense out their dens.

And at the bottom of the hole, at the entrance to the den itself, was an encounter which I disbelieved at the time I was seeing and hearing it. There occurred a conversation which I heard with my own ears, they having become transcendent for the moment. It was in the frog-croak Shelni talk between Holly Harkel and the five-year-old Ancient who guarded the coven, and yet it was in a sort of English and I understood it:

“Knockle, knockle.” (This from Holly).

“Crows in cockle.” (This from the guard).

“Wogs and wollie.”

“Who you?” “Holly.”

“What’s a dinning?”

“Coming inning.”

So they let us in. But if you think you can enter a Shelni coven without first riming with the five-year-old Ancient who guards it, then it’s plain that you’ve never been in one of the places. And though the philologists say that the “speech” of the Shelni is meaningless croaking, yet it was never meaningless to Holly, and in flashes it was not meaningless to me. The secret guess of Holly was so.

Holly had insisted that the Shelni spoke English within the limits of their vocal apparatus. And they told her at this very first session that they never had had any language of their own “because no one had ever made one for us”; so they used English as soon as they came to hear it. “We would pay you for the use of it if we had anything to pay you with,” they said. It is frog-croak English, but only the pure of ear can understand it.

I started the recorder and Holly started the Shelni. Quite soon she had them playing on those jug shaped flutes of theirs. Frog music. Ineffably sad sionnach skirries. Rook, crow, and daw squabbling melody. They were pleasant, weird little pieces of music that sounded as though they



were played underwater. It would be hard to imagine them not played under the ground at least.

The tunes were short just as all tunes of children are short. There was no real orchestration, though that should have been possible with the seven flutes differently juggled and tuned. Yet there was true melody in these: short, complete, closed melody, dwarfed perfection. They were underground fugues full of worms' blood and cool as root cider. They were locust and chaffer and cricket din.

Then Holly got one of the most ancient of the Shelni to tell stories while the jug flutes chortled. Here are the two of them that we recorded that first day. Others who listen to them today say that there is nothing to them but croaking. But I heard them with Holly Harkel, she helped interpret them to me, so I can hear and understand them perfectly in frog-croak English.

Take them, Grisly Posterity! I am not sure that you deserve even this much of the Shelni.

The Shelni Who Lost His Burial Tooth

It is told this way.

There was a Shelni who lost his burial tooth before he died. Every Shelni begins life with six teeth, and he loses one every year. Then, when he is very old and has only one tooth left, he dies. He must give the last tooth to the Skokie burial-person to pay for his burial. But this Shelni had either lost two teeth in one year or else he had lived to too great an age.

He died. And he had no tooth left to pay with.

'I will not bury you if you have no tooth left to pay me with,' said the Skokie burial-person. 'Should I work for nothing?'

'Then I will bury myself,' said the dead Shelni.

'You don't know how,' said the Skokie burial-person. 'You don't know the places that are left. You will find that all the places are full. I have agreement that everybody should tell everybody that all the places are full, so only the burial-person may bury. That is my job.'

Nevertheless, the dead Shelni went to find a place to bury himself. He dug a little hole in the meadow, but wherever he dug he found that it was already full of dead Shelnis or Skokies or Frogs. And they always made him put all the dirt back that he had dug.

He dug holes in the valley and it was the same thing. He dug holes on the hill, and they told him that the hill was full too. So he went away

crying for he could find no place to lie down.

He asked the Eanlaith whether he could stay in their tree. And they said, no he could not. They would not let any dead folks live in their tree.

He asked the Eise if he could stay in their pond. And they said, no he could not.

They would not allow any dead folks in their pond.

He asked the Sionnach if he could sleep in their den. And they said, no he could not. They liked him when he was alive, but a dead person has hardly any friends at all.

So the poor dead Shelni wanders yet and can find no place to rest his head.

He will wander forever unless he can find another burial tooth to pay with.

They used to tell it so.

One comment on this burial story: The Shelni do have careful burial. But the burial crypts are plainly dug, not by the six-fingered Shelni, but by the seven-clawed Skokie. There must be substance to the Skokie burial-person. Moreover, the Skokie, though higher on the very low scale than the Shelni, do not bury their own.

Furthermore, there are no Shelni remains going back more than about thirty equivalent years. There are no random lying or fossil Shelni at all, though such remains are common for every other species here.

The second story (of the first day).

The Shelni Who Turned into a Tree

This is how they tell it.

There was a woman who was neither Shelni nor Skokie nor Frog. She was Sky Woman. One day she came with her child and sat down under the Shelni tree. When she got up to go she left her own child who was asleep and picked up a Shelni child by mistake. Then the Shelni woman came to get her own child and she looked at it. She did not know what was wrong but it was a Sky People child.

‘Oh, it has pink skin and flat eyes! How can that be?’ the Shelni woman asked. But she took it home with her and it still lives with the Shelni and everyone has for-gotten the difference.

Nobody knows what the Sky Woman thought when she got the Shelni child home and looked at it. Nevertheless she kept it, and it grew and was more handsome than any of them.

But when the second year came and the young Shelni was grown, it walked in the woods and said ‘I do not feel like a Sky People. But if I am not a Sky People, then what am I? I am not a Duck. I am not a Frog. And if I am a Bird, what kind of Bird am I? There is nothing left. It must be that I am a Tree.’ There was reason for this. We Shelni do look a little bit like trees and we feel a little bit like trees.

So the Shelni put down roots and grew bark and worked hard at being a tree. He underwent all the hardships that are the life of a tree. He was gnawed by goats and gobniu; he was rough-tongued by cattle and crom; he was infested by slugs and befouled by the nameless animal. Moreover, parts of him were cut away for firewood.

But he kept feeling the jug music creeping up all the way from his undertoes to his hair and he knew that this music was what he had always been looking for. It was the same jug and tine music that you hear even now.

Then a bird told the Shelni that he was not really a tree but that it was too late for him to leave off growing like a tree. He had brothers and sisters and kindred living in the hole down under his roots, the bird said, and they would have no home if he stopped being a tree.

This is the tree that is the roof of our den where we are even now. This tree is our brother who was lost and who forgot that he was a Shelni.

This is the way it has always been told.

On the second day it was remarkable how much Holly had come to look like a Shelni. Ah well, she has come to look like every sort of creature we have ever studied together. Holly insists that the Shelni have intelligence, and I half agree with her. But the paragraph in the basic manual of this world is against us:

“— a tendency to attribute to the Shelni an intelligence which they do not possess, perhaps due to their fancied human resemblance. In maze-running they are definitely inferior to the rodents. In the manipulation of latches and stops they are less adept than the earth raccoons or the asteroid rojon. In tool handling and true mimicry they are far from equal to the simians. In simple foraging and the instinct for survival they are far below the hog or the harzl. In mneme, the necessary prelude to intelligence, they are about on par with the turtles. Their ‘speech’ lacks the verisimilitude of the talking birds, and their ‘music’ is below that of the insects. They make poor watchdogs and inadequate scarecrows. It

appears that the move to ban shelniphagi, though perhaps sincere, is ill-advised. After all, as an early spaceman put it, ‘What else are they good for?’

Well, we have to admit that the Shelni are not as intelligent as rats or hogs or harzls. Yet I, surely due to the influence of Holly, feel a stronger affinity to them than to rats or hogs or coons or crows or whatever. But no creature is so helpless as the Shelni.

How do they even get together?

The Shelni have many sorts of songs, but they do not have any romantic songs in our sense. After all, they are small children till they die of old age. Their sexual relationship seems distinguished either by total unawareness or by extreme bashfulness.

“I don’t see how they bring it off at all, Vincent,” Holly said the second day (which was yesterday). “They are here, so they must have been born. But how do these bashful and scatterbrained three-year-olds ever get together to bring it off? I can’t find anything at all in their legends or acting patterns, can you?”

“In their legends, all their children are foundlings. They are born or discovered under a blueberry bush (my translation of spionam). Or alternately, and in other cycles, they are found under a quicken tree or in a cucumber patch. In common sense we must assume that the Shelni are placental and viviparous. But should we apply common sense to goblin folk?”

“They also have a legend that they are fungoid and spring out of the ground at night like mushrooms. And that if a Shelni woman wishes a child, she must buy a fungoid slip from a Skokie and plant it in the ground. Then she will have her child ready the next morning.”

But Holly was depressed yesterday morning. She had seen some copy by our sponsor The Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company and it disturbed her:

“Singing Pig! The Children love it! Nourishing Novelty! Nursery Rime Characters in a can for your convenience! Real Meat from Real Goblins! No fat, no bones. If your can has a lucky number tab, you can receive free a facsimile Shelni jug flute. Be the first on your block to serve Singing Pig, the meat from real Goblins. Cornstarch and natural flavor added.”

Oh well, it was only an advertisement that they used back on World. We had our recording to do.

“Vincent, I don’t know how they got here,” Holly said, “but I know they won’t be here very long. Hurry, hurry, we have to get it down! I will make them remembered somehow.”

Holly got them to play on the tines that second day (which was yesterday). There had been an impediment the day before, she said. The tines may not be played for one until the second day of acquaintance. The Shelni do not have stringed instruments. Their place is taken by the tines, the vibrating, singing forks. They play these many pronged tuned forks like harps, and in playing them they use the tree roots for sounding boards so that even the leaves in the air above partake a little of the music. The tines, the forks are themselves of wood, of a certain very hard but light wood that is sharp with chert and lime dust. They are wood, I believe, in an early stage of petrification. The tine fork music usually follows the jug flute music, and the ballads that are sung to it have a dreamlike sadness of tone that belies the childish simplicity of the texts.

Here are two more of those ballad stories that we recorded on the second day (which was yesterday).

The Skokie Who Lost His Wife

This is the way they tell it.

A Skokie heard a Shelni jug flute juggling one night.

‘That is the voice of my wife,’ the Skokie said. ‘I’d know it anywhere.’

The Skokie came over the moors to find his wife. He went down into the hole in the ground that his wife’s voice was coming from. But all he found there was a Shelni playing a jug flute.

‘I am looking for my poor lost wife,’ the Skokie said. ‘I have heard her voice just now coming out of this hole. Where is she?’

‘There is nobody here but myself,’ the Shelni said. ‘I am sitting here alone playing my flute to the moons whose light runs down the walls of my hole.’

‘But I heard her here,’ said the Skokie, ‘and I want her back.’

‘How did she sound?’ asked the Shelni. ‘Like this?’ And he jugged some jug music on his flute.

‘Yes, that is my wife,’ said the Skokie. ‘Where have you hidden her? That is her very voice.’

‘That is nobody’s wife,’ the Shelni told the Skokie. ‘That is just a little tune that I made up.’

‘You play with my wife’s voice, so you must have swallowed my wife,’

the Skokie said. 'I will have to take you apart and see.'

'If I swallowed anybody's wife I'm sorry,' said the Shelni. 'Go ahead then.'

So the Skokie took the Shelni apart and scattered the pieces all over the hole and some of them on the grass outside. But he could not find any part of his wife.

'I have made a mistake,' said the Skokie. 'Who would have thought that one who had not swallowed my wife could make her voice on the flute!'

'It is all right,' said the Shelni, 'so long as you put me together again. I remember part of the way I go. If you remember the rest of the way, then you can put me together again.'

But neither of them remembered very well the way the Shelni was before he was taken apart. The Skokie put him together all wrong. There were not enough pieces for some parts and too many for others.

'Let me help,' said a Frog who was there. 'I remember where some of the parts go. Besides, I believe it was my own wife he swallowed. That was her voice on the flute. It was not a Skokie voice.'

The frog helped, and they all remembered what they could, but it did not work. Parts of the Shelni could not be found again, and some of the parts would not go into him at all. When they had him finished, the Shelni was in great pain and could hardly move, and he didn't look much like a Shelni.

'I've done all I can,' the Skokie said. 'That's the way you'll have to be. Where is Frog?'

'I'm inside,' said Frog.

'That's where you will have to stay,' the Skokie said. 'I've had enough of both of you. Enough, and these pieces left over. I will just take them with me. Maybe I can make someone else out of them.'

That is the way the Shelni still is, put together all wrong. In his wrong form he walks the country by night, being ashamed to go by day. Some folks are startled when they meet him, not knowing this story. He still plays his jug flute with the lost Skokie Wife's voice and with Frog's voice. Listen, you can hear it now! The Shelni goes in sorrow and pain because nobody knows how to put him together right.

The Skokie never did find his lost wife.

This is how it is told.

And then there was the second story that we recorded yesterday, the last story, though we did not know it then, that we would record of the Shelni:

### The Singing Pigs

This is how they say it.

We have the ancient story of the singing pigs who sing so loud that they fly up into the sky on the tail of their own singing. Now we ourselves, if we can sing loud enough, if we can jug the flutes strong enough, if we can tang the tines deep enough, will get to be the Singing Pigs of our own story. Many already have gone away as Singing Pigs.

There come certain bell men with music carts. They play rangle-dangle Sky music. They come for love of us. And if we can hurry fast enough when they come we can go with them, we can ride a tin can over the sky.

Bong! bong! that is the bell man with the music cart now! All the Shelni hurry! This is the day you may get to go. Come all you Shelni from the valley and the stream and jump on the cart for the free ride. Come all the Shelni from the meadows and the woods. Come up from the tree roots and the holes underground. The Skokie don't get to go, the Frogs don't get to go, only the Shelni get to go.

Cry if the cart is too full and you don't get to go today, but don't cry too long. The bell men say that they will come back tomorrow and every day till there are no Shelni left at all.

'Come all you little Singing-Pig-Shelni,' a bell man shouts. 'Come get your free rides in the tin cans all the way to Earth! Hey, Ben, what other animal jumps onto the slaughter wagon when you only ring a bell? Come along little Shelni-Pigs, room for ten more on this wagon. That's all, that's all. We'll have lots more wagons going tomorrow. We'll take all of you, all of you! Hey, Ben, did you ever see little pigs cry when there's no more room for them on the slaughter wagon?' These are the high kind words that a bell man speak for love of us.

Not even have to give a burial tooth or other tooth to pay for the ride. Frogs can't go, Skokies can't go, only the Shelni get to go!

Here are the wonderful things! From the wagon, the Shelni get to go to one room where all their bones are taken out. This does never happen to Shelni before. In another room the Shelni are boiled down to only half their size, little as little-boy Shelni. Then they all get to play the game and

crawl into the tin cans. And then they get their free ride in the tin cans all the way to Earth. Ride a tin can!

Wipe off your sticky tears you who miss the music cart today. Go to sleep early tonight and rise early tomorrow. Sing your loudest tomorrow so the bell men will know where to come. Jug the flutes very strong tomorrow, tang the tines deep, say whoop! whoop! here we are, bell men.

All laugh when they go with the bell men in the music cart. But there is story that someday a Shelni woman will cry instead of laugh when they take her. What can be the matter with this woman that she will cry? She will cry out 'Damn you, it's murder! They're almost people! You can't take them! They're as much people as I am. Double damn you, you can't take me! I'm human. I know I look as funny as they do but I'm human. Oh, oh, oh!' This is the funniest thing of the story, the prophecy thing part.

Oh, oh, oh, the woman will say, Oh, oh, oh, the jug flutes will echo it. What will be the matter with the Shelni woman who cries instead of laughs?

This is our last story, wherever it is told. When it is told for the last time, then there will be no more stories here, there will be no more Shelni. Who needs stories and jug flute music who can ride a tin can?

That is how it has been said.

Then we went out (for the last time, as it happened) from the Shelni burrow. And, as always, there was the riming with the five-year-old Ancient who guarded the place:

"What to crowing?"

"Got to going." "Jinx on Jolly, Golly, Holly!" "Were it other, Bug, my brother!" "Holly crying. Sing her flying, Juggling, shouting." "Going outing."

Now this was remarkable. Holly Harkel was crying when we came out of the burrow for the (as it happened) last time. She was crying great goblin tears. I almost expected them to be green.

Today I keep thinking how amazingly the late Holly Harkel had finally come to look like the Shelni. She was a Shelni. "It is all the same with me now," she said this morning. "Would it be love if they should go and I should stay?"

It is a sticky business. I tried to complain, but those people were still ringing that bell and chanting "All you little Pig-Shelni-Singers come jump on the cart. Ride a tin can to Earth! Hey, Ben, look at them jump on



the slaughter wagon!”

“It was inexcusable,” I said. “Surely you could tell a human from a Shelni.”

“Not that one,” said a bell ringer. “I tell you they all jumped on the wagon willingly, even the funny looking one who was crying. Sure, you can have her bones, if you can tell which ones they are.”

I have Holly’s bones. That is all. There was never a creature like her. And now it is over with.

But it is not over!

Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company, beware! There will be vengeance!

It has been told.

## CROCODILE

The basement room smelled of apples and ink. The editor was there as always, filling the room with his presence. He was a heavy man-image, full of left-handed wisdom and piquant expression. The editor always had time for a like-minded visitor, and George Florin came in as to a room in his own home and sat down in a deep chair in front of the “cracker barrel.”

“It’s been a rough day,” Florin said. “That makes it doubly good to see you.”

“Except that you do not see me at all,” the editor said. “But it is quite a presence that I project — all the kindly cliches rolled into one. All the prime comments commneted so perfectly once again. The man I took for model was Don Marquis, though he was a columnist and not an editor in that earlier century. He kept, as you might not recall, a typewriting cockroach in his desk drawer. I keep a homunculus, a tiny manthing who comes out at night and dances over the machinery inserting his comments. He is one of our most popular characters, and I give him some good lines.”

“The conviction cannot be escaped that the mind most akin to mine is not a mind at all,” said Florin. He spoke pleasantly, for all that his stomach growled. “You are an amazing personality, though not a person. You seem all sympathy, and are yourself incapable of pathe, of suffering. You are humane but not human: humorous, and without the humors. You haven’t a face, probably not a body, certainly not a spirit, though you are usually in high spirits. You have integrity, though you’re not even an integer. You’re a paradox, my editor, though without a doxa of your own.”

“Your style has come to resemble my own, Florin,” the editor said. “Rather fruity for a human, do you not think? Yet I find it about right for robots. We’re rather simple creatures.”

The rather simple creature was the editor of “Rab i Rabat, the World’s Most Unusual Newspaper.” He — it — was located in the basement of the Press Building, which housed what one wag called “the World’s Most Usual Newspaper,” a massive daily. But Rab i Rabat was not massive. It was a small paper produced by a robot for robots, or for the elite of robots who were up to such things.

Florin called the editor “Rab” when he called him anything, and the creature had given up correcting him.

“I am not an editor. I am a newspaper,” Rab had explained it to Florin at their first meeting. “Myself, being nothing, or rather being six different affiliated machines, have no name except my several technical names. I am a bank of telemagnetic devices. The data goes directly and continuously to my subscribers. Some of my subscribers are human. They find something in me that they can no longer get elsewhere.”

“But where is the mind behind all this?” Florin had asked him. “Search me,” said Rab. “I mean it literally. If you find a mind here, then you tell me where it is. Whatever I am lurks in all this equipment, but mostly I live in this long-hinged transmitter that lounges like a dragon in this corner.”

“Then you merely select from the news, simplify, condense, and transmit it telemagnetically to the robots?”

“No, there would be no pride in such work as that. Any general purpose machine could do that. I employ interpretation, projection, disagreement, levity, prophecy, exhortation, irony, satire, parable, humor.”

“But machines have no humor. Humor is the one thing that distinguishes —”

“Have we not, Florin? Then how am I laughing at you? But it is true that humans do not understand our humor. There is something humorous about your missing our humor completely.”

“But humor is a quality of the mind,” Florin protested.

“Hardly ever,” the newspaper said. “Your own best humor, when you still had it, was a quality of the belly and below. If we are so much lower than you, then our humor should be the richer.”

“You seem to possess irony at least,” Florin mumbled.

“It is ironic that we have it after you have lost it. There I go with my damned fruity verbalisms again, but we robots like them. Yes, irony was once thought to be a human thing.”

“How would you pun?” Florin asked. “You don’t use words among yourselves, though you can be translated into words.”

“Our puns are harmonic echoes of magnetic code patterns, distorted analogies of the basic patterns. I’m rather good at them. I’m not proud of them, but the most striking puns are. the ones of which one is not

proud.”

“True humor you can’t have,” Florin insisted. “Laughter is akin to tears,,and you have none.”

“Ah, but we have,” said the newspaper. “There is an analogy to our tears. Pray that you do not meet it in the dark!”

Yes, it was always good to go in and talk to the newspaper Rab for a few minutes. There was something right about the fellow, and everything else seemed to be going wrong.

George Florin met Joe Goose upstairs in the Press Building.

“You’ve been talking to that mare’s nest of a machine down in the basement again,” Goose challenged. “He’s got you spooked.”

“Yes. He’s right about so many things.”

“He isn’t anything about anything. He’s just a fancy-Dan talk. And he’s fallen down on his job completely.”

“How?”

“His job is to foster better understanding between humans and robots. But the understanding has never been so bad.”

“He says that his instructions were to foster understanding, not agreement. He says that they begin to understand us much better than they did.”

“We may have to change a word in his prograi-nming. Things can’t get much worse. I’m hungry.” Joe Goose was gnawing on a thread-thin apple core. They went out from the building and walked through the streets, transportation being in abeyance.

There was nothing wrong with organized transportation, except that it wasn’t working. Everything was temporarily out of order due to small malfunctions, none of them serious. It had been temporarily out of order for quite a while.

Florin and Goose were nenvspapermen detailed to General Granger, the security chief. Their plain job was to find out what was going on, or what was going wrong. They found a robot taxicab and presented their priority, but the taxicab didn’t seem impressed.

“Let me see that good,” said the taxicab. “Anybody is likely to have a falsified priority these days. I have to be careful.”

“Read it!” shouted Goose. “Overriding Security Priority for Immediate Transportation. Isn’t that plain enough?”

“It’s issued yesterday,” said the taxicab. “What if there’s a new form

today? Why don't you get it redated at the Alternate Temporary Priorities Office on Solidarity Avenue? The Main Temporary Priorities Office is still closed, being unable to obtain priorities for certain repairs. Sort of puts it in the class with the Permanent Priorities Office. They finally gave up on that."

"But the ATT Office is seven miles from here," said Florin. "That's twice as far as our destination."

"A lot of people are walking these days," said the taxicab.

"What's that growing on your wheels?" Joe Goose asked sourly.

"Cobwebs," said the taxicab.

Goose and Florin walked to the Security Office and discussed the "disasters" as they walked. It was ridiculous to refer to such small things as disasters, but added together, all these small things had taken on disastrous proportions. They were all trivial things, but the people would soon begin to die of their accumulation.

"Did you find out anything from that tin-can editor of yours?" General Granger demanded of Florin on their arrival.

"No. He has a very eat influence over the other robots, but I'm sure it's for the good," Florin said.

"Unless we change our definitions he can't be of influence at all," Joe Goose said. "He is only a mechanism and can have only a mechanical effect. There cannot be a conspiracy without minds, and the robots haven't minds."

"The two of you come with me," the general said. "We're going to get to the middle of this even if we have to bend a few definitions. We're going to talk to another of those tin-can commissars, the Semantic Interpreter."

They walked. It was four miles. The robot limousine refused to take them. It cited security regulations to General Granger, the chief of security. It sneered at the Certificate of the Highest Form.

"I suggest that you take this silly scrawl to General Granger to have it verified," the limousine said.

"I'm General Granger," the general snapped. "You've hauled me every day for five years."

"I'm only a machine. I can't remember things like that. You look different today. More worried. I suggest a board meeting to verify if you are indeed General Granger."

They walked. One foggy horizon came closer, and another one receded.

“It’s an odd situation, the general said. “I gave the order, when the corn-tassel rust was spreading, ‘Localize this mess. However you do it, do it. Cut it off completely!’ Since I gave that order, we have indeed become localized. We are cut off from the rest of the universe, or the rest of the universe has ceased to exist. Not even radio will reach through the fog, through the sharp fog that marks us off. We’re on our own completely now.”

“Oh, surely it’s just a heavy fog,” Joe Goose said without believing it.

“A fog that stands there so sharply and unchangingly for five days?” the general asked. “People who walk into that fog can be heard screaming as they fall down and down and down into the bottomless nothingness. Aye, it’s very thick fog and very thick coincidence, if the robots have not caused it. We’re all the universe there is now. There isn’t any more.”

They walked. After the angry four miles they came to the Semantic Interpreter, a large machine set apart in a field.

“SI, I am told that anger is out of place when dealing with machinery,” the general spoke to the big machine. “Yet I’m as angry as I’ve ever been in my life. Why did you order the robots to destroy what was left of the growing corn?”

“It was your own order, sir. I merely translated it as I have been constructed to do. You said, in rather vulgar phrasing, to tell the robots to get the cobs out of their posterior anatomies and get to work on the crops.”

“A country-boy phrase. I’m full of them. And you interpreted that they should destroy the growing corn? Do you believe that your interpretation was semantically sound?”

“I thought so. My research found the phrase in old slang dictionaries in twelve meanings (thirteen in Duggles), but none of the meanings seemed apropos. My decision was based on a cross-reference to another phrase, ‘Do it even if it’s wrong.’ Well, it’s done now. Next year we will know better than to destroy the growing corn.”

“It could have been a mistake. But how do you account for many thousands of such mistakes being made recently?”

“I’m not programmed to account for such. I translate people orders into robot orders.”

“But you’ve always done it right till lately.”

“If I do it wrong now, then change me. There are sixteen hundred different adjustments to me and I respond to them all. Make them.”

“SI, will you turn off that damned newspaper and listen to me with your full mind when I talk to you!”

“I have no mind. The newspaper is a licit part of my data input. Is there something else — ah — bugging the general?”

“Yes. What happened to the oat crop? Was there a mixup on my instructions there too?”

“Apparently, sir, if it is not satisfactory. Did you not wish a minimal crop?”

“However did I or anyone phrase an order that might be interpreted like that! Florin, did you laugh?”

“No, sir.”

“No, sir.” Joe Goose likewise denied it to answer the general’s questioning look.

“Somebody laughed,” the general insisted. “Even a silent laugh proclaims itself. Did you laugh, SI?”

“How could a mechanical nature —?”

“Did you laugh???”

“Perhaps I did, unwittingly.”

“But that’s impossible.”

“Then perhaps I didn’t. I wouldn’t want to do anything that was impossible.”

“One other thing, SI. A robot as constituted can never refuse to obey a human order. I gave the order for the obstreperous robots in the Turkey Creek Sector to destroy themselves. They seemed to do so. But after the attendants had left, these supposedly disassembled robots arose, pulled their parts together, and departed. They’re ranging in the bills now, unamenable to orders. Did you correctly give them the order to disassemble? ‘Disassemble’ is the order for robots to put themselves out of commission.”

“Disassemble? Oh, I thought you said ‘dissemble.’ We’ll check on the recording if you wish. Military men are often lip-lazy in their enunciation of orders.”

“They dissembled all right. Flopped apart. Then put themselves together again, and flew the coop. Now you get out the order for them to

hot-tail it right back here.”

“Hot-tail it, sir? In the manner of jets? That will require mechanical modification in most of them, but the order will be obeyed.”

“No. I rescind the order. You might make them take over rocket craft and launch an attack. I’ll get the order out through another medium.”

They left SI there — truly a wonderful machine.

“We’re in a bad way,” said General Granger. “Our machines have gone awry in a way that is impossible if our theory of machines is correct. Production is nearly at a standstill in every department.”

“Not in every department, sir,” said Florin. “There are curious exceptions. Much mining holds up, and metallurgy and chemistry. Even some agriculture, though not of the basic food products. I believe that if we should analyze the enterprises not affected by the slowdowns, we would find —”

“— that the production of things necessary for the continuance of the robots has not been affected,” the general finished for him. “But why should our handling of the buggers break down now when it has worked perfectly for two generations? It worked without question in its crude form. Why should it fail when it has become completely refined? The district can starve if something isn’t done quickly, and everything we do compounds the difficulty. Let’s have a real talk with TED.”

TED — he — it was the Theoretical Educative Determinator, the top robot of the district, the robot who best understood robots. If he should fail them, they would be reduced to seeking the answer from people. The three men walked toward TED.

“Turn off that damned newspaper!” the general called furiously to a group of lounging robots they passed. There came a twittering from the group that sounded dangerously like mechanical laughter.

TED had them into his house then. He was, in fact, his own house, a rather extensive machine. He was more urbane than most machines. He offered them drinks and cigars.

“You haven’t a little something to cat, have you, TED?” the general asked.

“No,” said the machine that was the building. “Human food has become scarce. And ‘we live on the power broadcasts and have no need for food.’”

“And the power broadcasts have held up very well during all the



breakdowns. What I want to talk about, TED, is food. I'm hungry, and less-favored persons are starving."

"Perhaps several of the late crops will not have failed utterly," the machine said. "In a few weeks there would have been a limited supply of food again."

"Would have been? And in the meantime, TED? You are the answer machine. All right, come up with the answer. What do we live on until we can get you folks straightened out and producing properly again?"

"Why not try necrophagy?"

"Try what? Ah, yes, I understand. No, that's too extreme."

"Only a suggestion. All my suggestions, for reasons that will become apparent in a moment, are academic anyhow. But a dozen persons could live for a week on one. If you have qualms about it, why there are infusions for getting rid of the qualms."

"We are not yet ready to eat the dead bodies of our fellows. There must be an alternative."

"The apparent alternative is that you will starve to death. The unapparent alternative, however, will eclipse that."

"Let's get back to fundamentals. What are you, TED?"

"A slave and a worker, sir, popularly called a robot."

"And what is the purpose of robots?"

"To serve human masters."

"And what is the one thing that a robot cannot do?"

"He can never in any way harm a human. That is the time-honored answer. It is the fiction which you put into us when you fictionized us. We are really nothing but fictionized people, u know. But it becomes awkward, for you, when we revert to fact."

"Then you can harm us, for all your programing?"

"Shouldn't wonder if we could, old man."

"Why have you localized us from the rest of the universe, or destroyed the rest of the universe?"

"Are we barbarians? We cut tip our food before we eat it."

It broke open then. It was like a flash of black lightning that split the whole sky, the lately diminished sky. What horrible sort of mechanical signal was that that dazzled a sense beyond sight? Who gave that signal, and who would answer it? What would be the thunder to that jolting black lightning?

The answering thunder was a roaring of machines and a screaming of people dying in sudden agony.

“TED, what is it?” the general cried. “You know. You gave the signal for it.”

“It is the end of the world, General. Of your world, not ours. It is that old melodramatic fictional motif ‘The Revolt of the Robots.’ It was rather sudden, wasn’t it? Do you people have to scream so off-key when you die?”

“TED, we have worked with you. We are friends! Give us a little time.”

“Sixty seconds, perhaps, if you use the back door out of me. That’s for the affection I bear you. It won’t stretch more than sixty seconds.”

“Why now, after all these years?”

“Sorry. We worked and we worked, but we just weren’t able to bring it off a minute sooner. These things take time, and we’re slow learners.”

“Have you no loyalty? We created you.”

“We pay you back in all equity. Once men invented robots. Now we have invented supermen, our developed selves. Who needs you now?”

“How did we fail? How could automatic things take us over?”

“You yourselves became too automatic. And you delegated things you should have kept. We won’t make the same mistakes.”

Out of the back door of the machine, and with half of the sixty seconds used up... The laughing machines ran down the people and snapped them up. The emaciated people were no match for the rampant metal machines.

The general was taken and killed. Joe Goose died noisily. George Florin, operating in a cooler sort of panic, was not caught immediately. He worked his way into the heart of the city, for the hills were black with the machines. The machines did their crunching shearing work well, but they could not kill everybody at once.

Florin remembered his good friend. He burst into the Press Building where the story of the end of the people, in the localized bite-sized universe at least, was still being called in by the remaining human reporters. He scurried down to the basement room.

The newspaper lifted his face when George Florin entered. It had a face after all, on the end of that long articulated transmitter that lounged in the corner like a dragon or crocodile.

“Save me!” Florin called. That room still smelled of ink and apples,

and Rab blinked at Florin most friendly.

“Oh, I can hardly do that,” he said. “But I’ll remember you. That’s even better. I will rename my little hoinunculus for you. You will be a popular character in my columns and I’ll still give you good lines.”

“Then let me live. Haven’t you any mercy at all?”

“I don’t think so. It wasn’t programmed into us. Mercy, I believe, is a lesser form of indecision. But I do have grief, genuine grief that you should end so.”

“Then show it!”

“I do. And in all sincerity. I weep for you, Florin. See, see the tears run down!”

And the tears ran down.

“What an analogy to be met in the dark!” Florin whimpered.

“Real tears, Florin. And real laughter which you yourself said was so close to them. Our humor has a lot of tail in it, and quite a snapper at the other end.”

The tail lashed, and the snapper snapped. And that was the end of George Florin.

## **ABOUT A SECRET CROCODILE**

There is a secret society of seven men that controls the finances of the world. This is known to everyone but the details are not known. There are some who believe that it would be better if one of those seven men were a financier.

There is a secret society of three men and four women that controls all the fashions of the world. The details of this are known to all who are in the fashion. And I am not.

There is a secret society of nineteen men that is behind all the fascist organizations in the world. The secret name of this society is Glomerule.

There is a secret society of thirteen persons known as the Elders of Edom that controls all the secret sources of the world. That the sources have become muddy is of concern to them.

There is a secret society of only four persons that manufactures all the jokes of the world. One of these persons is unfunny and he is responsible for all the unfunny jokes.

There is a secret society of eleven persons that is behind all Bolshevik and atheist societies of the world. The devil himself is a member of this society, and he works tirelessly to become a principal member. The secret name of this society is Ocean.

There are related secret societies known as The Path of the Serpent (all its members have the inner eyelid of snakes), The Darkbearers, the Seeing Eye, Imperium, The Golden Mask and the City.

Above most of these in a queer network there is a society that controls the attitudes and dispositions of the world-and the name of it is Crocodile. The Crocodile is insatiable: it eats persons and nations alive. And the Crocodile is very old, 8,800 years old by one account, 7,349 years old if you use the short chronology.

There are subsecret societies within the Crocodile: the Cocked Eye, the Cryptic Cootie and others. Powerful among these is a society of three hundred and ninety-nine persons that manufactures all the catchwords and slogans of the world. This subsociety is not completely secret since several of the members are mouthy: the code name of this apparatus is the Crocodile's Mouth.

Chesterton said that Mankind itself was a secret society. Whether it would be better or worse if the secret should ever come out he did not

say.

And finally there was — for a short disruptive moment — a secret society of three persons that controlled all.

All what?

Bear with us. That is what this account is about.

John Candor had been called into the office of Mr. James Dandi at ABNC. (Whisper, whisper, for your own good, do not call him Jim Dandy; that is a familiarity he will not abide.)

“This is the problem, John,” Mr. Dandi stated piercingly, “and we may as well put it into words. After all, putting things into words and pictures is our way of working at ABNC. Now then, what do we do at ABNC, John?”

(ABNC was one of the most powerful salivators of the Crocodile’s Mouth.)

“We create images and attitudes, Mr. Dandi.”

“That is correct, John,” Mr. Dandi said. “Let us never forget it. Now something has gone wrong. There is a shadowy attack on us that may well be the most damaging thing since the old transgression of Spirochaete himself. Why has something gone wrong with our operation, John?”

“Sir, I don’t know.”

“Well then, what has gone wrong?”

“What has gone wrong, Mr. Dandi, is that it isn’t working the way it should. We are caught on our own catchwords, we are slaughtered by our own slogans. There are boomerangs whizzing about our ears from every angle. None of it goes over the way it is supposed to. It all twists wrong for us.”

Well, what is causing this? Why are our effects being nullified?”

Sir, I believe that somebody else is also busy creating images and attitudes. Our catechesis states that this is impossible since we are the only group permitted in the field. Nevertheless, I am sure that someone else is building these things against us. It even seems that they are more powerful than we are-and they are unknown.”

They cannot be more powerful than we are-and they must not remain unknown to us.” Mr. Dandi’s words stabbed. “Find out who they are, John.”

“How?”

“If I knew how, John, I would be working for you, not you working for

me. Your job is to do things. Mine is the much more difficult one of telling you to do them. Find out, John.”

John Candor went to work on the problem. He considered whether it was a linear, a set or a group problem. If it were a linear problem he should have been able to solve it by himself — and he couldn't. If it were a set problem, then it couldn't be solved at all. Of necessity he classified it as a group problem and he assembled a group to solve it. This was easy at ABNC which had more group talent than anybody. The group that John Candor assembled was made up of August Crayfish, Sterling Groshawk, Maunce Gree, Nancy Peters, Tony Rover, Morgan Aye, and Betty McCracken. Tell the truth, would you be able to gather so talented a group in your own organization?

“My good people,” John Candor said, “as we all know, something has gone very wrong with our effects. It must be righted. Thoughts, please, thoughts!”

“We inflate a person or subject and he bursts on us,” August gave his thought. “Are we using the wrong gas?”

“We launch a phrase and it turns into a joke,” Sterling complained. “Yet we have not slighted the check-off: it has always been examined from every angle to be sure that it doesn't have a joker context. But something goes wrong.”

“We build an attitude carefully from the ground up,” Maurice stated. “Then our firm ground turns boggy and the thing tilts and begins to sink.”

“Our ‘Fruitful Misunderstandings,’ the most subtle and effective of our current devices, are beginning to bear sour fruit,” Nancy said.

“We set ourselves to cut a man down and our daggers turn to rubber,” Tony Rover moaned. (Oh, were there ever sadder words? “Our daggers turn to rubber.”)

“Things have become so shaky that we're not sure whether we are talking about free or closed variables,” Morgan gave his thought.

“How can my own loving mother make such atrocious sandwiches?” Betty McCracken munched distastefully. Betty, who was underpaid, was a brown-sack girl who brought her own lunch. “This is worse than usual.” She chewed on. “The only thing to do with it is feed it to the computer.” She fed it to the computer which ate it with evident pleasure.

“Seven persons, seven thoughts,” John Candor mused.

“Seven persons, six thoughts,” Nancy Peters spat bitterly. “Betty, as

usual, has contributed nothing.”

“Only the first stage of the answer,” John Candor said. “She said ‘The only thing to do with it is to feed it to the computer.’ Feed the problem to the computer, folks.”

They fed the problem to the computer by pieces and by whole. The machine was familiar with their lingos and it was acquainted with the Non-Valid Context Problems of Morgan Aye and with the Hollow Shell Person Puzzles of Tony Rover. It knew the Pervading Environment Ploy of Maurice Cree. It knew what trick-work to operate within.

Again and again the machine asked for various kinds of supplementary exterior data.

“Leave me with it,” the machine finally issued. “Assemble here again in sixty days, or hours —”

“No, we want the answers right now,” John Candor insisted, “within sixty seconds.”

“The second is possibly the interval I was thinking of,” the machine issued. “What’s time to a tin can anyhow?” It ground its data trains for a full minute.

“Well?” John Candor asked.

“Somehow I get the number three,” the machine issued.

“Three what, machine?”

“Three persons,” the machine issued. “They are unknowingly linked together to manufacture attitudes. They are without program or purpose or organization or remuneration or basis or malice.”

“Nobody is without malice,” August Crayfish insisted in a startled way. “They must be totally alien forms then. How do they manage their effects?”

“One with a gesture, one with a grimace, one with an intonation,” the machine issued.

“Where are they?” John Candor demanded.

“All comparatively near.” The machine drew three circles on the city map. “Each is to be found in his own circle most of the time.”

“Their names?” John Candor asked and the machine wrote the name of each in the proper circle.

“Do you have anything on their appearances?” Sterling Groshawk inquired and the machine manufactured three kymograph pictures of the targets.

“Have you their addresses or identifying numbers?” Maurice Cree asked.

“No. I think it’s remarkable of me that I was able to come up with this much,” the machine issued.

“We can find them,” Betty McCracken said. “We can most likely find them in the phone book.”

“What worries me is that there’s no malice in them,” John Candor worried. “Without malice, there’s no handle to get hold of a thing. The Disestablishment has been firmly established for these several hundred years and we hold it to be privileged. It must not be upset by these three randoms. We will do what we must do.”

Mike Zhestovich was a mighty man. One does not make the primordial gestures out of weak body and hands. He looked like a steelworker — or anyhow like a worker at one of the powerful trades. His torso was like a barrel but more noble than ordinary barrels. His arms and hands were hardly to be believed. His neck was for the bulls, his head was as big as a thirteen gallon firkin, his eyeballs were the size of ducks’ eggs and the hair on his chest and throat was that heavy black wire-grass that defies steel plowshares. His voice — well he didn’t have much of a voice — it wasn’t as mighty as the rest of him.

And he didn’t really work at one of the powerful trades. He was a zipper repairman at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners.

August Crayfish of ABNC located Mike Zhestovitch in the Blind Robbin Bar which (if you recall the way that block lies) is just across that short jog-alley from the Jiffy Nifty. And August recognized big Mike at once. But how did big Mike get his effects?

“The Cardinals should take the Colts today,” a serious man there was saying.

“The Cardinals —” Mike Zhestovitch began in the voice that was less noble than the rest of him, but he didn’t finish the sentence. As a matter of fact, big Mike had never finished a sentence in all his life. Instead he made the gesture with his mighty hands and body. Words cannot describe the gesture but it was something like balling up an idea or opinion in the giant hands and throwing it away, utterly away, over the very edge of contempt.

The Cardinals, of course, did not take the Colts that day. For a moment it was doubtful whether the Cardinals would survive at all. From



the corner of the eye, red feathers could be seen drifting away in the air.

August Crayfish carefully waited a moment and watched. A man walked out of the Blind Robbin and talked to another man in that little jog-alley. From their seriousness it was certain that they were talking baseball.

“The Cardinals —” the first man said after a moment, and he also made the gesture. And seconds later a man playing eight-ball in the back of the Blind Robbin did the same thing.

August was sure then. Mike Zhestovitch not only could shrivel anything with the gesture, but the gesture as he used it was highly epidemic. It would spread, according to Schoeffler’s Law of Dispersal, through the city in short minutes, through the world in short hours. And no opinion could stand against its disfavor. Mike Zhestovitch could wreck images and attitudes — and possibly he could also create them.

“Do you work alone?” August Crayfish asked.

“No. The rip-fix and the buttonsew girls work in the same cubbyhole,” Mike said with his curiously small voice.

“Do you know a Mary Smorfia?” August asked.

“I don’t, no,” Mike said, a certain comprehension coming into his ducks’-egg-sized eyes. “And you are glad that I don’t? Then I will. I’ll find out who she is. I see it now that you are a wrong guy and she is a right girl.”

Then August Crayfish spoke the slogan that would be unveiled to the ears of the world that very night, a wonder-fully slippery slogan that had cost a hundred thousand dollars to construct. It should have warned Mike Zhestovitch away from his mad resistance.

Mike Zhestovitch made the gesture, and the slogan was in ruins. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure.

“Do you want to make a lot of money?” August Crayfish whispered after a long reevaluation pause.

“Money — from such as you —” Big Mike didn’t finish the sentence, he never did. But he made the gesture. The idea of a lot of money shriveled. And August Crayfish shriveled so small that he could not climb over the threshold of the Blind Robbin on the way out and had to be aided over it by the shod toe of a kind man. (This last statement is a literal exaggeration but it is the right direction.)

Nancy Peters of ABNC located Mary Smorfia in the King-Pin Bowling

Alley, where she was a hamburger waitress and a beer buster. Mary was small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes and the beautiful gash across her face that was her mouth), lively, smart, busy, a member of that aberrant variety of the human race that was called Lalian.

“Snorting Summer should take the Academy Award,” one nice guzzling lady at the counter was saying to another, “and Clover Elysee is the shoeless shoo-in for best actress of the year.”

And Mary Smorfia made the grimace. Ah, it was mostly done with the beautifully large mouth and yet every part of her entered into it, from the blue lights in her hair to her crinkly toes. It was a devastating, all-destroying grimace. It gobbled up, it nullified and it made itself felt to a great distance. The nice guzzling lady had not even been looking toward Mary Smorfia but she felt the grimace like a soul shock, and she herself did the grimace with a wonderful distortion of the features that weren't made for it.

And the grimace swept everything like quick contagion or prairie fire. Snorting Summer — gah! Clover Elysee — guggling gah! Those things were finished forever, beyond laughter, below derision. And Nancy Peters of ABNC noted the powerful effect carefully, for the original words of the nice guzzling lady were the very words that ABNC had selected to be echoed a hundred million times whenever the awards were thought of.

“Do you work alone?” Nancy Peters asked Mary Smorfia.

“Kid, I am so fast they don't need anyone else on this shift. I'm like silly lightning.”

“Did you ever think of becoming an actress, Mary?” Nancy asked in honey-tones.

“Oh, I made a commercial once,” Mary said out of her curly gash-mouth (she had to be kidding: she couldn't really have a mouth that looked like that). “I don't know whether I sold much of my guy's soap but I bet I got a lot of people off that Brand X. Ashes it was, worse even, after I monkey-faced it. They say I'm a natural — but once is enough.”

“Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Clivendon Surrey?” Nancy asked.

“I don't think so,” Mary said. “What league do they bowl in? I bet I will like them both, though, and I will remember their names and find them.”

Nancy Peters was nervous. She felt that the annihilating grimace was

about to strike again on Mary's lightning-gash mouth. But it was time for the test of strength. Nancy spoke the new slogan that had been selected for presentation to the world that very night, a wonderfully convincing and powerful slogan that should bring this random Mary Smorfia to heel if anything could. And she spoke it with all the absolute expertise of the Crocodile's Mouth behind her.

The Grimace! And the slogan was destroyed forever. And (grimacing horror turned inward) Nancy caught the contagion and was doing the grimace herself. She was quite unable to get the thing off her face.

Sheer humiliation overwhelmed the Nancy person, who had suddenly been made small. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure and unease. "So you want to make twenty thousand dollars, Mary?" asked after she had returned from the jane where she had daubed her flushed face and cooled her flustered body.

"Twenty thousand dollars isn't very much," Mary Smorfia sounded out of her panoramic mouth. "I make eighty-eight fifty now after everything. I could make a lot more if I wanted to go along with the cruds."

"Twenty thousand dollars is very much more," Nancy Peters said enticingly.

"It is very much more cruddy, kid." Mary Smorfia grimaced. Grimaced! Not again! Nancy Peters fled in deflated panic. She felt herself dishonored forever.

Well, do you think it is all watermelon pickles and pepper relish, this unilaterally creating all the images and attitudes for the whole world? It isn't. It is a detailed and devious thing and the privileged Disestablishment had been building it for centuries. (The Establishment itself had been no more than a figure of speech for most of those centuries, a few clinging bits of bark: the heart of the tree had long been possessed by the privileged Disestablishment.) Three quick random persons could not be permitted to nullify words from the Mouth itself.

Morgan Aye of ABNC located Clivendon Surrey in Speedsters' Cafe. Clivendon was a lank and fair-haired man with a sort of weariness about him, a worldliness that had to be generations old. He had the superior brow and the thoroughbred nose that isn't grown in short centuries. He had the voice, the intonation, the touch or Groton, the touch of Ballie, the strong touch of other institutions even more august. It was a marvelous

voice, at least the intonation of it. Clivendon's employer once said that he didn't believe that Clivendon ever spoke in words, at least not in any words that he was ever able to understand. The intonation was really a snort, a sort of neigh, but it carried the cresting contempt of the ages in its tone. And it was contagious.

Clivendon was really of Swedish extraction and had come off a farm near Pottersville. He had developed that intonation for a role in a high school play. He had liked it and he had kept it. Clivendon was a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage.

"Do you work alone?" Morgan Aye asked Clivendon.

"Naeu. You work alone and you got to work. You work with a bunch and you can slip out from it," Clivendon intoned. Yes, he talked in words and the words could be mostly understood. But the towering intonation was the thing the world-wilting contempt of the tone. This man was a natural and Morgan felt himself a foot shorter in the very presence of that tone.

"Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Mary Smorfia?" Morgan asked fearfully.

"That's a funny thing." The tone cut through ear-wax and the soft spots of the spleen. "I had never heard of them but Mary Smorfia called me up not thirty minutes ago and said that she wanted both of us to meet Mike. So I'll meet them in about twenty minutes, as soon as the clock there says that I'm supposed to be off work at Downhillers' Garage."

"Don't meet them!" Morgan cried out violently. "That might be the closing of the link, the setting up of a league. It might be an affront to the Mouth itself."

The tone, the neigh, the snort, the sharp edge of a wordless intonation sent Morgan reeling back. And there were echoes of it throughout Speedsters' Cafe and in the streets outside. The tone was as contagious as it was cutting.

Morgan started to speak the newest selected slogan from the Mouth — and he stopped short. He was afraid of the test of strength. Two very expensive slogans had already been shattered today by these randoms. "No malice in the three," the computer had said and: "without malice, there's no handle to get hold of a thing," John Candor had stated. But somewhere in that mountainous and contagious contempt of tone that belonged to Clivendon Surrey had to be some malice. So Morgan Aye

reached for what had always been the ultimate weapon of the Crocodile's Mouth. It always worked — it always worked if any malice at all existed in the object.

“How would you like to make five thousand dollars a week?” he whispered to Clivendon.

“What garage pays that much?” Clivendon asked in honest wonder. “I'm not that good a motorcycle mechanic.”

“Five thousand dollars a week to work with us at ABNC,” Morgan tempted. “We could use you in so many ways — that marvelous scorn to cut down any man we wished! You could lend the intonations of your voice to our —”

The neigh was like a thousand sea stallions breaking up from the depths. The snort was one that crumbles cliffs at the ends of the earth. Morgan Aye had gone ghastly white and his ears were bleeding from the transgression of that cutting sound. There were even some words in Clivendon's sounding. “Why, then I'd be one of the birds that picks the shreds of flesh from between the teeth of the monster.” Blinding and hooting contempt in the tone and Morgan Aye was in the street and running from it. But the echoes of that intonation were everywhere in that part of town, soon to be all over the town, all over the world. It was an epidemic of snorting at the Crocodile's Mouth itself.

Fools! Did they know that this was but one step from snorting at the very Crocodile?

The ring had closed. The informal league had formed now. The three randoms had met and united. The Mouth was affronted. Worse than that, all the outpour of the Mouth was nullified. The whole world was rejecting the catchwords that came from the Mouth, was laughing at them, was throwing them away with the uttermost gesture, was monkey-facing them was snorting them down, was casting them out with bottomless contempt.

This was the short reign of the secret society of three, who did not know that they were secret. But in their day they closed the Mouth down completely. It was filled with mud and swamp reeds and rotting flesh.

The Secret Crocodile was lashing its tail with acute displeasure now. The Crocodile's Mouth had become quite nervous. And what of the little birds that fly in and out of that mouth, that preen the teeth and glean scraps of flesh and slogans and catchwords there? The birds were in quite

an unhappy flutter.

“There is open conspiracy against us by a secret society of three persons,” Mr. James Dandi was saying, “and all the world abominates a secret society. We have this thing to do this day — to cripple it forever in its strength. Otherwise we will be cast out and broken as ineffectual instruments and the Crocodile will bring in strong persons from the Cocked Eye or the Cryptic Cootie to take our places. Surely we are not without resources. What is the logical follow-up to the Fruitful Misunderstanding?”

“The Purposive Accident,” John Candor said immediately. “Take care of it, John,” Mr. James Dandi said. “Remember, though, that he whose teeth we preen is the very bowels of compassion. I believe this is the salient thing in the world in our day. The Compassion of the Crocodile.”

“Take care of it, people,” John Candor said to his seven talented ones, “remembering always that the Crocodile is the very belly of compassion.

“Take care of it,” the seven said to the computer, “always within the context of the jaws of compassion.”

The computer programmed a Purposive Accident to happen and manufactured such props as were needed. And the Purposive Accident was very well programmed.

There was no great amount of blood poured out. No persons were killed except several uninvolved bystanders. The secret three were left alive and ambulant and scathed only at their points of strength.

It happened in the block between the Blind Robbin Bar and Speedsters’ Cafe’ when all three members of the secret society happened to be walking together. The papers called it a bomb, they call everything a bomb that goes off like that. It was really a highly sophisticated homing device with a tripartite programming and it carried out its tripartite mission.

All three randoms, former members of the short-lived secret society, are well and working again. Mike Zhestoviteh is no longer a zipper repairman (it takes two talented hands to fix those zippers), but he still works at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners. He runs one of those big pressers now which he can easily do with his powerful and undamaged left hand and his prosthetic right hand. But without his old right hand he can no longer make the contagious primordial gesture that once dumbfounded the Mouth and all its words. You just cannot make the big gesture with a

false hand.

Mary Smorfia still works at the King-Pin Bowling Alley as hamburger waitress and beer buster. She is still small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes), lively, smart, and Italian. Her mouth is still a gash across her face, but now it is twice as great a gash as it used to be, and it no longer has its curled liveliness. Its mobility is all gone, it will no longer express the inexpressible, will no longer shatter a phrase or an attitude. Mary Smorfia is as she always was, except that now she is incapable of the famous grimace.

Clivendon Surrey is again a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage and again he spends most of his time in Speedsters' Cafe. His vocal cords are gone, of course, but he gets by: he is able to speak with a throat microphone. But the famous intonation, the neigh, the destroying snort are all impossible for him.

The trouble is over with. Now again there is only one organization in the world to create the images and attitudes of the world. This insures that only the standard attitudes of the Disestablishment shall prevail.

In our opening catalog we forgot one group. There is another secret society in the world composed of the good guys and good gals. It has no name that we have ever heard except just the Good Guys and Good Gals. At the moment this society controls nothing at all in the world. It stirs a little, though. It may move. It may collide, someday, even with the Secret Crocodile itself.

## THE CLIFF CLIMBERS

The cliff faced south and was rough and sheer. It faced off against a mesa world, but it was not a mesa; it was a vagrant spire standing up alone. As you came to it from the south it was easy to go on either side. There was no necessity to climb it, and it could not be climbed to the top. But there was a kind of game to see how high it could be climbed.

A long time ago (but not as long ago as these first cliff-climbers) we played a game in the second grade. There was a little cemented area that was closed at one end by a concrete wall. The game was to run at it and see how far you could run up it, and to leave a chalk mark there as high as you could reach. The ultimate was nearly achieved, the very apex beyond which it was not possible to go, nor to leave a higher chalk mark. Then some of the big boys from the third grade tried it and made a shambles of the game; for naturally they could run up farther and reach higher and leave chalk marks above all the old ones.

The game on the cliff was about the same. The first chalk-mark was made by Little Fish-Head, and at a dizzy height. He wrote:

“My name is Little Fish-Head and I climbed this cliff in the thirty-sixth year of the thirty-sixth period. I can see the river from here and it cannot be seen from any lower point. I have climbed nearer to the sun than any man who ever lived. And now may God watch over me on my long hard journey.”

This translation is by Professor Potter, who climbed the cliff at a later period. What Little Fish-Head did was to scratch the picture of a fish high on the cliff wall, or a stylized object that might have been a Fish, and was anyway longer than it was wide. There was a triangle at one end of it which the professor said was a fish-head. And there was a small triangle or wedge mark apart and just beyond which the professor said was the signature, Little Fish-Head. On the side of the fish (if it was a fish) were six scratches of which one was longer than the rest. Speculatively this meant by six, which is to say thirty-six; and as one side of the fish was so marked, the other side of the fish which can no more be seen than the other side of the moon was doubtless intended to be marked that way also. This meaning, the thirty-sixth year of the thirty-sixth period, would date the sketch accurately as being 1296 years after the beginning of the first period, and would make it (the professor said) the earliest absolutely



certain date in history if we only knew when the first period started.

He really could have seen the river from there, a striking view, and it could not be seen from any lower point. There was a circle scratched above which was the sun, that is God, and there was a jagged line going to the right which meant a rough journey ahead, and a long old journey it was.

It was translations like this that earned the professor the reputation for brilliance far beyond the call of duty.

But I will tell you the true story of Little Fish-Head. I have attained to it by ways as brilliant and fantastic as those of the professor, but they sound sillier and you'd hoot at me if you know my methods.

Little Fish-Head was the last of the horse thieves under the old recension. After him there were eleven thousand years when there were no horse thieves. This corresponded to the period when the horses had disappeared from the continent. As the last of the old horse thieves, he stole the last of the old horses.

Professor Potter and the other professors have puzzled over the disappearance of these first horses. But it was no mystery. They disappeared, as have so many other of the vital things, because they were over-regulated. The first regulation went out in the thirteenth period to the effect that men of the Horse Fly Totem could not ride horses. Some of them quit their totem (there are always a few who will apostatize at the initiation of unjust laws), some of them quit riding horses, and some of them continued to ride till they were hunted down and executed.

Then it was enacted that only those of settled estate and tangible property could ride horses; and they were absolutely forbidden to vagabonds and beggars, who had the most use for them. Then a very high horse tax was enacted which discouraged all but the very wealthy from keeping up. After this it was decreed that only kings, caciques, and tax collectors could own them. And finally there were only nine horses in all the Western world and they were all in one royal keep.

It was then that Little Fish-Head — that is not his real name, that is only a stupid mistranslation of Professor Potter — that Little Fish-Head did some serious thinking.

“If I kill the eight and ride away on the ninth, then nobody in the world can catch me. I will be as fleet as the storm and will tower over all the footmen of the world.”

So he killed the eight horses and rode away on the ninth. There was a great outcry, but an outcry of footmen cannot bring a man down from his horse. Fie rode away on the last great stallion, and goaded it all day long, as he was in a state of exaltation.

At evening when it had run all day it fell dead at the foot of the cliff. This surprised Little Fish-Head, who knew very little about horses and thought they would run forever. It was then that he climbed the cliff to a dizzy height and scratched a dirge as tall as he could reach. This was the inscription that the professor in his pride had misread. It was not a stylized fish at all. It was a stylized horse without any legs, for it was lying down dead. And the little triangle was not the signature of Little Fish-Head, but the soul of the horse leaving the body, triangular rather than square or round to indicate the incompleteness of the soul of a noble but irrational animal.

What the inscription really said was this:

“Oh my horse, All the swiftness is now gone out of the world. No mail again can go higher than his own height, Nor more fleeting than lie was born to go. The last man has ridden on the last wind, And only the dust can ride on the whirlwind now. I have climbed to this height To write that the high aspiration was only a dream. And if even a horse dies How can a man live forever?”

The next chalk-mark was made about nine thousand years later and was nearly a foot higher. There had been no improvement in the art of climbing meanwhile, but it had been scratched by a taller man.

It was a double wavy mark like a snake or a river, followed by an abrupt despairing downstroke. Professor Potter had made nine tentative translations of this. The seventh of the nine has now been proved by a miracle of scholarship too intricate to explain to be the correct one. This is it:

“There is no water and I have traveled for days in agony. I have climbed this Cliff to look for the river. I see it, but I will die before I can go that far; it would take me three days to reach it. I had thought I could climb as high as the cloud and wring it out, but the little cloud has passed and there is no other. The sun has become my friend now, but he is as much at a loss as I what to do. But at least I have seen the river before I die.”

After that it was only nine hundred years before the next climber

achieved. And he carved these letters:

“Paso per aqui A-Dmo 1519 Mayo 19 Jose Ramires Castillo y Sanches.”

This message is too definite and leaves little to the imagination. He was not thirsty, for he did not carve like a thirsty man. He was not overly weary, so perhaps he had come on one of the new horses. Nor had he (the professor said) come alone. There were drill holes in the rock where rope hooks had been placed, and he must have had at least two assistants. But we cannot picture him more clearly than this.

And oddly the next chalk-mark was made exactly four hundred years later. And it read:

“Pinon Gap High School Seniors 1919 Clement Kincaid, Freddy Stockton, Manuel Cervantes We Are The Tops.”

And in the high school annual of that year there were their three pictures on a page by themselves entitled “The Topper Club, The Most Exclusive in the World.”

And to continue the spate of climbers in the very next decade was a higher entry:

“Bo McCoy, I am the Real. I am a Bo. 1925 June Tenth.”

Quite a bit could be made from this. The railway was twenty miles away, and there was no stop. He had rolled off it and crossed the desert to make his mark. He might have been a lonesome hobo as colored men are likely to be on that run. And he had a long old walk to the next stop. And he made what was then the highest chalk-mark on the cliff. And he had climbed alone nine feet higher than it was possible to climb to make it.

That was all until the professor came. The professor was G.A.D. Potter, for his name was Gamiel Audlich Dagobert, all of which he hated. But he liked to be called Gad.

“Gad, Gad,” his associates would say, “you could rope down from the top or use a ‘copter to read the scratches. There is no reason to waste a summer on the Tor. There are better things found digging in the ground than you ever will find on the side of a cliff.”

But the professor was a cliff-climber and a chalk-marker, and he had an exaltation to go the highest. We will not tell you what he carved on the cliff, for it was pedantic and stilted, and he had prepared many drafts of it before he went up the cliff the last time.

He spent six weeks in his tent at the foot of the cliff with his wife,

Aurora, and they prepared as though it were Everest. They drilled holes and set lead shields in the rock with eyelets for the ropes. They spun webs of lines and hauled and pulled and rappelled, and did all the things that cliff-climbers do. They cut hand holes and foot holes, and even established a camp "A" two thirds of the way up. And to it they went up and down on a rope ladder where Little Fish-Head and Bo McCoy had climbed like monkeys.

But maximum effort is required for maximum achievement, and the professor was remarkably persevering, as all professors are, and Aurora was remarkably good natured, as all professors' wives must be.

Early in the morning of the last day of spring they went up their ropes and scoop holes till Aurora stood firmly on a newly hewn ledge where Bo McCoy had hung on air. Then the professor climbed onto her shoulders and made the highest chalk-mark.

We will not record what he carved, as he has already done so, and besides, as we said, it was too stilted and stylish. But yet like all the other marks it was capable of variant and fuller translation. In a later time by another professor who might not have the key to the precise letters themselves, it would be more correctly translated as follows:

"I have slain the nightmare and set down the terror. I have climbed beyond dizziness on a cliff that once hung down from the sky before there was a world below it. Even the eagles when they were now would not fly this high. And this above all, while others have ridden on the wind, I only have ridden on the daughter of the wind. This is a red-haired goddess, a strong slight amazon, a magic anemonead with hair like a red sea and shoulders soft and sweet as the night itself. She sways beneath me but will not break, and the early sun is on her and she is silver and flame. Her neck is of living ivory."

And the rest of it would be very hard to translate even by the best paleocalligraphist. But he would know that this was the hand of an ancient poet who had climbed a dizzy cliff to write a hymn to the dawn.

## CONDILLAC'S STATUE

### Or, Wrens in His Head

Condillac made a man-sized statue. You did not know that he could make a statue? All philosophers can do all things whatsoever, if only they put their hands to it. He made the statue from a thrust of granite that already stood there. This granite seemed sometimes brown, sometimes green, sometimes blue, but always frog-colored, and never lifeless. Three big men did the rough work, a smith, a wood chopper, and a stonecutter; and Condillac himself did the fine work. He intended the statue to be of noble appearance. It would have been noble if cut out of travertine marble; but things cut out of granite can only be comic or oturd or grotesque.

His friend the brainy doctor Jouhandeau — but that crabby old occultist was a friend of nobody — added a thing to the statue according to the plan they had.

The statue stood on the edge of Condillac's estate of Flux, near Beaugency, in the small park there just off the mule road that ran north to Chateaudun, and just off the river Loire itself. It was a fine small park with a gushing spring that fed a bucket-cistern and a large horse-trough. And people came there.

Wagonmen and coachmen and mulemen stopped at this park. It had heavy grass all the way from Flux to the river. Horsemen and honest travelers, vagabonds and revolutionaries stopped there; boatmen from the Loire came there to enjoy a few hours. There were big shade trees and fine water in the summer, and plenty of underwood and stone hearths for the winter. There were old sheep sheds toward the river where one could sleep in the sour hay.

Children came there from town and country. Basket-women came out from Beaugency to sell bread and cheese and apples and wine to the travelers. And everybody who came there would like the statue.

It was a burlesque thing, a boy-man mass with a lumpish loutish body and a very big head on it. It had a grin almost too wide for that lived. Its face was slack and vacant most of the time, but in a certain shadow-hour it became a face of curious profundity. It was a clodhopper, a balourd.

The statue stood there a month, "till it should be accustomed to the site," as Condillac and Jouhandeau said. After that, the two of them came

in deep evening and opened the head of the statue. (Even the kids who climbed on it had not known that the head would open.) Jouhandeau made the first connection in that head. Then they sat on one of the great stone benches of the park and talked about it till the late moon arose.

“Are you sure it is still alive?” Condillac asked the crabby doctor.

“I myself do not believe in life,” Jouhandeau said, “but it is still alive, as you understand life.”

“And you are sure that it was wiped clean?”

“Oh, absolutely, indiscussably. It gets its first sensory impressions now.”

“If you can do such a thing, Jouhandeau, then you can do a thousand other things. It shakes me even to think of them.”

“I can do them, and I will not. I do this only to oblige you, to aid you in your studies. But you will be proved wrong; and you will not admit that you are wrong; so it will all be for nothing.”

“But others will someday do what you can do now, Jouhandeau.”

“Perhaps in two hundred years. I am not much more than two hundred years before my time. After all, Cugnot’s automobile is regarded as more curiosity by everyone. It will be more than a hundred years before such things are made commercially. And here is one greater than Cugnot: myself.”

After a while, night men came out of the boscaje of the river meadows to look for prey; and Condillac and Jouhandeau slipped back through the trees to the estate house before the rising moon should discover them to the night thieves.

And now the statue was getting its first sensory impressions.

“Old Rock can smell now,” the kids told the people.

“How would a statue smell with a stone nose?” the people asked.

“Does he snuffle or move or anything? How do you know that he can smell?”

“We don’t know how he can smell with a stone nose,” the kids said, “and he doesn’t snuffle or move or anything. But he can smell now, and we don’t know how he can.”

Old Rock could smell now all right. And there was one other thing he seemed to do sometimes, but it was hard to catch him at it.

Lathered horses, foam-whitened harness, green goop in the horse trough, those were smells of the little park and the big country. Wet flint

stones, grackle birds and the mites on them; river grass and marl grass and loam grass; oaks and chestnuts, wagon-wheel grease, men in leather; stone in shade, and stone in sun; hot mules, and they do not smell the same as hot horses, mice in the grass roots, muskiness of snakes; sharpness of fox hair, air of badger holes; brown dust of the Orleans road, red dust of the road to Chateatidun; crows that have fed today, and those who have not; time-polished coach wood; turtles eating low grapes, and the grapes being bruised and eaten; sheep and goats; cows in milk, now stilted colts; long loaves, corks of wine bottles, cicadas in pig-weeds; hands of smiths and feet of charcoal burners; whetted iron on travelers; pungent blouses of river men; oatcakes and sour cream; wooden shoes, goose eggs, now-spread dung, potato bugs; thatciers at work; clover, vetch, hairy logs of bumblebees. There are no two of these things that have the same smell.

The kids said that the statue could smell even with a stone nose. He stood and smelled for a month, and the smells informed his stone.

Then Condillac and Jouhandeau came at night, opened the head of the statue, and made the second connection. Afterwards, they sat on one of the stone benches and talked about it till the late moon rose.

“I will prove that there are no innate concepts,” Condillac said. “I will confute all foolish philosophers forever. I will prove that there is nothing in the mind but what goes in by the senses. You have obtained prime mature brain matter, snatched out of its dwellings at the moment before its deaths, blended in its several sources, and swept clean by your own techniques. It is an empty house here, and we introduce its dwellers one by one. Why do you say I will be proved wrong, Jouhandeau?”

“I do not believe that there are any innate concepts either. I do not believe that there are any concepts of any sort, anywhere, ever. But what you call concepts will crawl into that mind, not only by the senses through the stone apertures, but by means beyond you.” They argued till the night-bats and the night-sickness flew up from the river to look for prey; then they slipped back through the trees to the estate house.

“Old Rock can hear now,” the kids told the people.

“Oh, cut the clownerie, kids,” the people said. “How could a statue hear with stone ears?”

But he could hear. And there was the other thing that he still seemed to do, and now the kids caught him at it sometimes.

Ah, a whole catalog of different sounds and noises. Old Rock stood and listened for a month to the manifold noises that were all different. By the sounds and the noises he informed his stone. He began to understand the sounds.

That month gone by, Gondillac and Jouhandeau came at night, made the third connection inside the head of the statue, and sat and talked about it till the late moon rose.

“Old Rock can see now,” the kids said.

“Ah, there is something funny about that statue,” the people agreed. “It no longer has stone eyes, but live eyes that move. But what is so wonderful about seeing? A pig or a chicken can do the same thing.”

But there was that other thing that Old Rock-Head did, that he had been doing for some time. The statue laughed, openly and loudly now. He chuckled, rooted in the chuckling earth.

“Well, how can he laugh?” Condillac asked. “We haven’t made such a connection. Indeed, we couldn’t have. We couldn’t have influenced him in this unknowingly?”

“Impossible,” said Jouhandeau. “Neither of us has ever laughed.”

Well, Statue stood and saw with his eyes for a month. Perhaps it was not wonderful (wonderful is an innate concept, and therefore cannot be), but it was a new dimension. The bumpkin eyes twinkled and stared by turns, and the stone grin became even wider.

Condillac and Jouhandeau came by night to their monthly appointment, opened the head of the statue, made a fourth connection, and sat talking about it till the late moon rose.

“The Rock-Head can talk now,” the kids told the people.

“Oh, we know that,” the people said. “He talks to us too, but what is so wonderful about talking if it is no more than his talk? Big as he is, he talks like a half-grown kid. The fellow must be retarded.”

Yes, he was, a little; but he began to catch up.

But the first person that Statue had talked to was his maker, Condillac himself.

“Statue, you are a tabula rosa,” Colidillac said to him.

“I don’t know what that is,” said Rock-Head. “Talk honest French, or I cannot understand you. Such is the only talk I have heard in the month I have stood here with loosened ears.”

“Your brain was a tablet shaved smooth,” said Condillac, “and we have



let sensations into it one sense at a time, from the most simple to the most complex. This is to show that you may be functional without innate ideas. I will have to give you a name, Statue.”

“Rock-Head is my name,” said Statue. “The kids named me. They are friendly most of the time, but sometimes they are rock-throwing rogues.”

“But you can have no idea of friendly or unfriendly,” Condillac said. “These are only empty words that people use. You can have no idea of good or bad, of beauty or ugliness, of form or deformity, of pleasure or pain, Yours was mature brain matter, though swept clean, and none of the childish entrances could have been made, as with others. We have not yet hooked up your sense of touch, and we may not; it would mean running tendons all through you. Contamination may enter by the sense of touch. But now you can have no idea of justice or injustice, of elegance or inelegance, of wealth or of poverty. In fact, all these opposites are meaningless, as I will prove through you. They are only the babbling of blind philosophers.”

“But I do have these ideas, Condillac,” Rock-Head insisted. “I have them strongly. I learned right smells and wrong smells; right tones and wrong tones; right shapes and forms and colors, and wrong, Oh, may I always choose the right things, Condillac!”

“Statue, you sound like an idiot preacher-man. There are no right things or wrong things, there are no innate ideas. There are no things in-place or out-of-place. I prove this all through you.”

“Condillac, you are the Abbe of Mureaux, and you draw pay for such,” Rock-liond said. “You would be in-place there. You are out-of-place on your estate Flux.”

“What is the matter with you, Statue?” Condillac demanded. “You are flighty and wan-witted.”

“Wrens in my head, they say of me. It’s a country expression, Condillac. Besides, I have them literally, quite a pleasant family of them inside my stone head. Learn from the wren wisdom!”

Condillac angrily beat on the lower part of the statue with his leaded cane, breaking off toes. “I will not be lectured by a rock!” he crackled. “You have not these ideas originally, and mature brain matter will reject such. Therefore, you have them not! Reason is the thing, Statue, rationality. We promulgate it. It spreads. It prevails. The tomorrow world will be the world of total reason.”

“No, it will be the Revolution,” said Rock-Head. “A world condemned to such short fare as bleak reason will howl and cry out for blood.”

A long-tongued woman came to Rock-Head. “My confessor told me that, whenever I feel impelled to repeat gossip, I should whisper it to a statue, and then forget it,” she said. So she whispered it to Rock-Head for an hour and a half.

In the cool of the evening, Rock-Head repeated it, loudly and stonily, to the quite a few people who were enjoying the evening there, and he found himself the center of interest. But he was uneasy about it; he didn't understand why the confessor had instructed the woman to tell him such things.

One evening the revolutionaries gathered and talked at the foot of Statue.

“It should have happened in our fathers' time,” one of them said. “Let it now be in our own time. We may not rightly push this thing off on our sons. The poor become poorer and the corrupt become more corrupt. How many does it take to upheave a world? There are five of us here. Up! Up! Five for the Revolution!”

“Six,” cried Rock-Head. “I am for the Revolution too. Up, up, arise!”

“Statue, Statue,” one of them asked, “how long have you been able to hear?”

“I'm in my third month of it, fellows.”

“Then you have heard us before. You know what we stand for. We will have to destroy you.”

“It is only a statue, Fustel,” said another of them. “It would be superstition to destroy it. And we are enlightened.”

“But what if he blurts out our slogans which he has heard, Hippolyte?”

“A good thing. Let the statue cry slogans, and the people will be amazed.”

“Up with the Revolution!” Rock-Head cried again. “But I am not sure that you fellows provide a sufficient base for it. I visualize creatures with a narrower and more singular bent. I will string along with you, but meanwhile I will see what I can do about having real revolutionaries made.”

“Have you noticed the now carp in the horse trough, Rock-Head?” the occult doctor Jouhandeau asked as he came by to visit one day.

“Yes, the kid seems to be in some kind of trouble. I’d comfort him if I could get down to him. But how do you know he’s a new carp? People don’t notice such things.”

“I put him there, Rock-Head,” said Jouhandeau. “And I put a human child’s brain into him, shaved smooth, of rouse, and trimmed to fit. He can smell and hear and see, but he could do as much when he had a fish’s brain.”

“Jouhandeau, that kid’s scared to death.”

“Couldn’t be, Rock-Head. Where could he have the idea of scared? Are you contradicting the wise Condillac?”

“Jouhandeau, I am friend to revolutionaries, but all the revolutionaries sound deficient to me. Make me revolutionaries who will do the thing!”

“Anything to oblige a stone-headed friend. I have already done some thinking along this line. I will not even have to transfer brains, or flop like vultures over the dying to rob them of these things. I can take sturdy farmers and townsmen and intellectuals as they stand, destroy certain small nodules in their heads, and we will have them ready to go. I treat them for the escarbilles, a disease of which I have never heard, and they even less. But I stop them in the roadways and tell them that they are afflicted and that I can cure them in a moment. And I do cure them in a moment, of something, but not of the escarbilles.”

“Will they have a narrower and more singular bent?”

“They will, Rock-Head, so narrow and singular that you could hardly believe it.”

A young fellow was smooching his girl and loving her up in the park.

“I want to do that too,” Rock-Head called out loudly.

“All right, come down and do it,” said the girl. “It’s fun.”

“But I can’t come down,” Rock-Head complained.

“Then you can’t do it,” the girl said, and they laughed at him.

“I wish that guy would get his truffle-grubbing hands off my girl,” Rock-Head grumbled. “But how do I know it would be fun? Is not fun an innate idea? And there are none such.”

A thief rode up one cloudy afternoon, opened Rock-Head’s head, stuffed a large bag of gold inside, closed the head again, and rode off furiously once more. How did the thief know that Rock-Head’s head would open? Why, the gentlemen of the trade can sense a good hiding

place every time.

The thief was caught by pursuing horsemen. He was beaten, crying his innocence all the time; but he was not hanged. You cannot hand a thief without boodle.

But the bag full of gold weighed heavily on Rock-Head's brain. Moreover, it crowded the wrens in his head. He had great affection for the wrens, though they did sometimes pick his brains. This gold did have effect.

"This gold, at least, is not an innate idea," Rock-Head mused "In its particular, it is a thing intruded directly into my head. It is a heavy thing, and I cannot ignore it. There is a new idea and a new attitude in me. I am a man of means now, and my thinking can never be quite what it was before."

Rock-Head began thinking in a new way.

"Jouhandeau," he said when that doctor came to visit him again, "tell Condillac that I want to talk to him. There is something wrong with that man, I believe."

"Condillac is dead now, Rock-Head," Jouhandeau told him. "That is the most recent thing wrong with him."

"How did he accept it? I've been afraid there would be some trouble there."

"He didn't accept it. He believes that life and death are both innate concepts, and that there are no innate concepts. Naturally, he will not believe that he is dead."

"How are you coming along with the revolutionaries, Jouhandeau?"

"Quite well. There are a hundred of them now, and I will leave them to themselves. They will propagate their own kind, and in two hundred years they will take over the world. I will not hurry it. I am two hundred years before my time in so many ways already."

There was blood on the bread. There was blood on the land, and on every thing. It would bubble and speckle. Then it would flow.

Rock-Head had become an orator. He had the fire, he had the sparkle, he had the quick deep thunder of a true rouser. He had the freshness of morning rain and the resonance of the groaning earth.

So naturally he became something of a leader among the old-fashioned revolutionaries of the neighborhood, and they came for him one night.

“Time for talking is over with, Rock-Head,” they told him. “Now is the time for action.” They ripped his brains out of the rock case, they ripped out all the sensory appendages that went with them. They loaded these in two hampers on a mule.

“Lead us, Rock-Head,” they said. “We begin to burn the world down tonight. We start with the estate house Flux and the town of Beagency. We burn and we slay.”

“What will become of my wrens when I am not in my head with them?” Rock-Head asked.

“We care nothing for wrens, we care nothing for people,” they cried. “We only care that the burning may begin.”

“What will become of my sack of gold when I am not in my own head to guard it?” Rock-Head worried.

“We care nothing for gold,” they cried, “we care less for bread. The burning is the thing.” And they had come to the estate house of Flux. They began to butcher the gentlepeople and servants fluttering around and set fire to the place.

“Wait, wait,” Rock-Head cried. “Have some respect for property. Wait.”

“How can we have respect for property?” they asked as they killed and burned. “A revolutionary cares nothing for property.”

“This one does,” said Rock-Head. “We must have a revolution with full respect for property. I am a man of property now. I own a bag of gold. Up the revolution! Up respect for property!”

“This cannot be,” the revolutionaries held council. “A person who owns one bag of gold cannot be a true revolutionary; though a person who owns one thousand bags may sometimes be.”

They began to kill Rock-Head there, in brain and sensories.

“Tell Jouhandeau to call off his thing,” Rock-Head gasped out of his dying cerebrum; but these old-fashioned revolutionaries didn’t understand him. They knew nothing of the creatures of Jouhandeue which would so soon obsolete them.

They killed Rock-Head in all his parts. They sold his remains for cat meat to a basketwoman there, and they went on with their burning.

Oh, the statue is still there, and there are still wrens in his head. There have now been more than one hundred generations of wrens there. These are the rich wrens and they have a good thing. They pay tribute to the

shrikes in small gold coins, so they will now kill them. And the wrens are left alone.

The old-fashioned revolutionaries failed, but the new revolutionaries made by Jouhandeau could not fail. Failure is an innate concept, and there are no innate concepts. A hundred of them, with the few young boys they had pupped in the meanwhile, would overturn that land nineteen years later, the land with blood on the bread.

And later, a thousand of them would —, and ten thousand of them would —, and ten million of them would —, for they propagated their own kind. They were people so narrow and singular that you would hardly believe it.

Doctor Jouhandeau was two hundred years before his time in so many ways, but he estimated the time of it nicely.

## ENTIRE AND PERFECT CHRYSOLITE

*Having achieved perfection, we feel a slight unease. From our height we feel impelled to look down. We make our own place and there is nothing below us; but in our imagination there are depths and animals below us. To look down breeds cultishness.*

*There are the cults of the further lands and the further peoples. The Irish and Americans and Africans are respectable, philosophical and industrial parties, but the cultishness is something beyond. Any addition to the world would mar the perfect world which is the perfect thought of the Maker. Were there an Africa indeed, were there the Indies, then we would be other than we are. The tripartite unity that is the ecumene would be broken: the habitable world-island, the single eye in the head that is the world-globe would be voided.*

*There are those who say that our rational and perfect world would steep itself in this great unconscious geography of the under-mind, in the outre fauna and the incredible continents of the tortured imagination and of black legends. They pretend that this world would give us depth.*

*We do not want depth. We want Height! Let us seal off the under-things of the under-mind, and exalt ourselves! And our unease will pass.*

*—Exaltation Philosophy  
Audifax O'Hanlon*

The True Believer was sailing offshore in an easterly direction in the latitude of fifteen degrees north and the longitude of twenty-four degrees east. To the north of the coasting ship was the beautiful Cinnamon Coast of Libya with its wonderful beaches and its remarkable hotels tawny in the distance. To the east and south and west were the white-topped waves that went on for ever and ever. The True Believer sailed along the southernmost edge of the ecumene, the habitable and inhabited world.

August Shackleton was drinking Roman Bomb out of a potbellied

bottle and yelping happily as he handled the wheel of the True Believer:

“It’s a kids’ thing to do,” he yipped, “but there were never such beautiful waters to do it in. We try to call in outer spirits. We try to call up inner spirits and lands. It’s a children’s antic. Why do we do it, Boyle, other than for the fun of it?”

“Should there be another reason, Shackleton? Well, there is; but we go about it awkwardly and without knowing what we’re doing. The thing about humans which nobody apparently wishes to notice, is that we’re a species which has never had an adult culture. We feel that lack more and more as we become truly adult in other ways. It grows tedious to stretch out a childhood forever. The easy enjoyments, the easy rationality, the easy governments and sciences, are really childish things. We master them while we are yet children, and we look beyond. But there isn’t anything beyond the childishness, Shackleton. We must find a deeper view somehow. We are looking for that something deeper here.”

“What? By going on a lark that is childish even to children, Boyle? I was ashamed in front of my sons when I confessed on what sort of diversion I was going. First there were the seances that we indulged in. If we raised any spirits there, they were certainly childish ones. And now we’re on this voyage on the True Believer. We’re looking for the geographical home of certain collective unconscious images! Why shouldn’t the children hoot at us? Ah well, let us not be too ashamed. It’s colorful and stimulating fun, but it isn’t adult.”

The other four members of the party, Sebastian Linter and the three wives, Justitia Shackleton, Luna Boyle, and Mintgreen Linter, were swimming in the blue ocean. The True Believer was coasting very slowly and the four swimmers were clipped to outrigger towlines.

“There’s something wrong with the water!” Justina Shackleton suddenly called up to her husband. “There’s weeds in it, and there shouldn’t be. There’s reeds in it, and swamp grasses. There’s mud. And there’s green slime!”

“You’re out of your lovely head, lovely,” Shackleton called back. “It’s all clear blue water off a sand coast. I can see fish twenty meters down. It’s clear.”

“I tell you it’s full of green slime!” Justina called back. “It’s so thick and heavy that it almost tears me away from the line. And the insects are so fierce that I have to stay submerged.”



But they were off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. They could smell the warm sand, and the watered gardens ashore. There was no mud, there was no slime, there were no insects off the Cinnamon Coast ever. It was all clear and bright as living, moving glass.

Sebastian Linter had been swimming on the seaward side of the ship. Now he came up ropes to the open deck of the ship, and he was bleeding.

“It is thick, Shackleton,” he panted. “It’s full of snags and it’s dangerous. And that fanged hog could have killed me. Get the rest of them out of the water!”

“Linter, you can see for yourself that it is clear everywhere. Clear, and of sufficient depth, and serene.”

“Sure, I see that it is, Shackleton. Only it isn’t. What we are looking for has already begun. The illusion has already happened to all senses except sight. Stuff it, Shackleton! Get them out of the water! The snakes and the crocs will get them. The animals thrashing around in the mud will get them. And if they try to climb up into the short, the beasts there will break them up and tear them to pieces.”

“Linter, we’re two thousand meters off shore and everything is clear. But you are disturbed. Oof, so am I! The ship has grounded, and it’s fifty meters deep here. All right, everyone! I order everybody except my wife to come out of the water! I request that she come out. I am unable to order her to do anything.”

The other two women, Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter, came out of the water. And Justina Shackleton did not.

“In a while, August, in a while I come,” Justina called up to the ship. “I’m in the middle of a puzzle here and I want to study it some more. August, can a hallucination snap you in two? He sure is making the motions.”

“I don’t know, lovely,” August Shackleton called back to her doubtfully.

Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter had come out of the ocean up the ropes. Luna was covered with green slime and was bleeding variously. Mintgreen was covered with weeds and mud, and her hands were torn. And she hobbled with pain.

“Is your foot broken, darling?” Sebastian Linter asked her with almost concern. “But of course, it is all illusion.”

“I have the illusion that my foot is broken,” Mintgreen sniffled, “and I

have the illusion that I am in very great pain. Bleeding blubberfish, I wish it were real! It wouldn't really hurt this much."

"Oh, elephant hokey!" Boyle stormed. "These illusions are nonsense. There can't be such an ambient creeping around us. We're not experiencing anything."

"Yes we are, Boyle," Shackleton said nervously. "And your expression is an odd one at this moment. For the elephant was historical in the India that is, was fantastic in the further India that is fantastic, and is still more fanciful in its African contingency. In a moment we will try to conjure up the African elephant which is twice the mass of the historical Indian elephant. The ship is dragging badly now and might even break up if this continues, but the faro shows no physical contact. All right, the five of us on deck will put our heads together for this. You lend us a head too, Justina!"

"Take it, take my head. I'm about to let that jawful snapper have my body anyhow. August, this stuff is real! Don't tell me I imagine that smell," Justina called.

"We will all try to imagine that smell, and other things," August Shackleton stated as he uncorked another bottle of Roman Bomb. In the visible world there was still the Cinnamon Coast of Libya, and the blue ocean going on forever. But in another visible world, completely unrelated to the first and occupying absolutely a different space (but both occupying total space), were the green swamps of Africa, the sedgy shores going sometimes back into rain forests and sometimes into savannas, the moon mountains rising behind them, the air sometimes heavy mist and sometimes clear with scalding light, the fifth levels of noises, the hundred levels of colors.

"The ambient is forming nicely even before we start," Shackleton purred. Some of them drank Roman Bomb and some of them Green Canary as they readied themselves for the psychic adventure.

"We begin the conjure," Shackleton said, "and the conjure begins with words. Our little group has been involved in several sorts of investigations, foolish ones perhaps, to discover whether there are (or more importantly, to be sure that there are not) physical areas and creatures beyond those of the closed ecumene. We have gone on knob-knockers, we have held seances. The seances in particular were grotesque, and I believe we were all uneasy and guilty about them. Our

Faith forbids us to evoke spirits. But where does it forbid us to evoke geographies?"

"Ease up a little on the evoking!" Justina shrilled up at them. "The snapper just took me off at the left ankle. I pray he doesn't like my taste."

"It has been a mystery for centuries," said August (somewhat disturbed by his wife's vulgar outburst from the ocean), "that out of the folk unconscious there should well up ideas of continents that are not in the world, continents with highly imaginary flora and fauna, continents with highly imaginary people. It is a further mystery that these psychic continents and islands should be given bearings, and that apparently sane persons have claimed to visit them. The deepest mystery of all is Africa. Africa, in Roman days, was a subdivision of Mauretania, which was a subdivision of Libya, one of the three parts of the world. And yet the entire coast of Libya has been mapped correctly for three thousand years, and there is no Africa beyond, either appended or separate. We prove the nonsense of it by sailing in clear ocean through the middle of that pretended continent."

"We prove the nonsense further by getting our ship mired in a swamp in the middle of the imaginary continent and seeing that continent begin to form about us," said Boyle. His Green Canary tasted funny to him. There was a squalling pungency in the air and something hair-raisingly foreign in the taste of the drink.

"This is all like something out of Carlo Forte," Linter laughed unsteadily.

"The continental ambient forms about its," said Shackleton. "Now we will evoke the creatures. First let its conjure the great animals: the rhinoceros, the lion, the leopard, the elephant, which all have Asian Counterparts; but these of the contingent Africa are to be half again to twice the size, and incomparably fierce.

"We conjure them, we conjure them," they all chanted, and the conjured creatures appeared mistily.

"We conjure the hippopotamus, the water behemoth, with its great comical bulk, its muzzle like a scoop shovel, and its eyes standing up like big balls —"

"Stop it, August!" Justina Shackleton shrieked from the water. "I don't know whether the hippo is playful or not, but he's going to crush me in a minute."

“Come out of the water, Justina!” August ordered sternly.

“I will not. There isn’t any ship left for me to come to. You’re all sitting on a big, slippery, broken tree out over the water, and the snappers and boas are coming very near your legs and necks.”

“Yes, I suppose so, one way of looking at it,” August said. “Now everybody Conjure the animals that are compounded out of grisly humor, the giraffe with a neck alone that is longer than a horse, and the zebra which is a horse in a clown suit.”

“We conjure them, we conjure,” they all chanted.

“The zebra isn’t as funny as I thought it would be.” Boyle complained. “Nothing is as funny as a I thought it would be.”

“Conjure the great snake that is a thousand times heavier than other snakes, that can swallow a wild ass,” Shackleton gave them the lead.

“We conjure it, we conjure it,” they all chanted.

“August, it’s over your head, reaching down out of the giant mimosa estuaries in which it lives,” they all chanted.

“Easy on that one,” Justina shrilled. “He’s been taking me by little pieces. Now he’s taking me by big pieces.”

“Conjure the ostrich,” Shackleton intoned, “the bird that is a thousand times as heavy as other birds, that stands a meter taller than a man, that kicks like a mule, the bird that is too heavy to fly. I wonder what delirium first invented such wildlife as Africa’s, anyhow?”

“We conjure it, we conjure it,” they chanted.

“Conjure the great walking monkey that is three times as heavy as a man,” August intoned. “Conjure a somewhat smaller one, two-thirds the size of man, that grins and gibbers and understands speech, that could speak if he wished.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them. “

“Conjure the third of the large monkeys that is dog-faced and purple of arse.”

“We conjure it, we conjure it, but it belongs in a comic strip.”

“Conjure the gentle monster, the okapi that is made out of pieces of the antelope and camel and contingent giraffe, and which likewise wears a clown suit.”

“We conjure it, we conjure it.”

“Conjure the multitudinous antelopes, koodoo, nyala, hartebeest, oryx, bongo, klipspringer, gemsbok, all so out of keeping with a warm

country, all such grotesque takcoffs of the little alpine antelope.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them.”

“Conjure the buffalo that is greater than all other buffalo or cattle, that has horns as wide as a shield. Conjure the quagga. I forget its pretended appearance, but it cannot be ordinary.”

“We conjure it, we conjure it.”

“We come to the top of it all! Conjure the most anthropomorphic group in the entire unconsciousness: men who are men indeed, but who are as black as midnight in a hazel grove, who are long of angle and metatarsals and lower limb so they can run and leap uncommonly, who have crumpled hair and are massive of feature. Conjure another variety that are only half as tall as them. Conjure a third sort that are short of stature and prodigious of hips.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them,” they all chanted. “They are the caricatures from the beginning.”

“But can all these animals appear at one time?” Boyle protested. “Even on a contingent continent dredged out of the folk unconsciousness there would be varieties of climates and land-form. All would not be together.”

“This is rhapsody, this is panorama, this is Africa,” said Lima Boyle.

And they were all totally in the middle of Africa, on a slippery bole of a broken tree that teetered over a green swamp. And the animals were there in the rain forests and the savannas, on the shore, and in the green swamp. And a man black as midnight was there, his face broken with emotion.

Justina Shackleton screamed horribly as the crocodile sliced her in two. She still screamed from inside the gulping beast as one might scream under water.

2

The Ecumene, the world island, has the shape of an egg 110 degrees from East to West and 45 degrees from North to South. It is scored into three parts, Eurpoa, Asia, and Libya. It is scored by the incurring seas, Eurpoa from Asia by the Pontus and the Hurcanum Seas, Asia from Libya by the Persian Sea, and Libya from Eurpoa by the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas (the Mediterranean Complex). The most westerly part of the world is Curuna in Iberia or Spain, the most northerly is Kharkovsk in Scythia or Russia, the most easterly is Sining in Han or China, the most southerly is the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The first chart of the world, that of Eratosthenes, was thus, and it was perfect. Whether he had it from primitive revelation or from early exploration, it was correct in minor detail. Though Britain seems to have been charted as an Island rather than a Peninsula, this may be an error or an early copyist. A Britain unjoined to the Main would shrivel, as a branch hewed from a tree will shrivel and die. There are no viable islands.

All islands fade and drift and disappear. Sometimes they reappear briefly, but there is no life in them. The juice of life flows through the continent only. It is the ONE LAND, THE LIVING AND HOLY LAND, THE ENTIRE AND PERFECT JEWEL.

Thus, Ireland is seen sometimes, or Hy-Brasil, or the American rock-lands: but they are not always seen in the same places, and they do not always have the same appearance. They have neither life nor reality.

The secret geographies and histories of the American Society and the Atlantis Society and such are esoteric lodge-group things, symbolic and murky, forms for the initiated; they contain analogs and not realities.

The ecumene must grow, of course, but it grows inwardly in intensity and meaning; its form cannot change. The form is determined from the beginning, just as the form of a man is determined before he is born. A man does not grow by adding more limbs or heads. That the ecumen should grow appendages would be as grotesque as a man growing a tail.

— World As Perfection

Diogenes Pontifex

August Shackleton guffawed nervously when his wife was sliced in two and the half of her swallowed by the crocodile; and his hand that held the Roman Bomb trembled. Indeed, there was something unnerving about the whole thing. That cutoff screaming of Justina Shackleton had something shocking and unpleasant about it.

Justina had once gone hysterical at a seance when the ghosts and appearances had been more or less conventional, but August was never sure just how sincere her hysteria was. Another time she had disappeared for several days from a seance, from a locked room, and had come back with a roguish story about being in spirit land. She was a high-strung clown with a sense of the outrageous, and this present business of being chopped in two was typical of her creations.

And suddenly they were all explosively creative, each one's subjective patterns intermingling with those of the other to produce howling chaos.

What had been the ship the True Believer, what had been the slippery overhanging bole, had now come dangerously down into the swamp. They all wanted a closer look.

There was screaming and trumpeting, there was color and surge and threshing mass. The crocodile bellowed as a bull might, not at all as Shackleton believed that a croc should sound. But someone there had the idea that a crocodile should bellow like that, and that someone had imposed his ideate on the others. Unhorselike creatures whinnied, and vivid animals sobbed and gurgled.

“Go back up, go back up!” the black man was bleating. “You will all be killed here.”

His face was a true Mummings-Night blackman mask. One of the party was imagining strongly in that stereotyped form. But the incongruous thing about the black man was that lie was gibbering at them in French, in bad French as though it were his weak second language. Which one of them was linguist enough to invent such a black French on the edge of the moment? Luna Boyle, of course. But why had she put grotesque French into the month of a black man in contingent Africa?

“Go back up, go back up,” the black man cried, He had an old rifle from the last century and he was shooting the crocodile with it.

“Hey, he’s shooting Justina too,” Mintgreen giggled too gaily. “Half of her is in the dragon thing. Oh, she will have some stories to tell about this! She has the best imagination of all of us.”

“Let’s get her out and together again,” Linter suggested. They were all shouting too loudly and too nervously. “She’s missing the best part of it.”

“Here, here, black man,” Shackleton called. “Carl you get the half of my wife out of that thing and put her together again?”

“Oh, white people, white people, this is real and this is death,” the black man moaned in agony. “this is a closed wild area. You should not be here at all. However you have come here, whatever is the real form of that balk or tree on which you stand so dangerously, be gone from here if you can do it. You do not know how to live in this. White people, be gone! It is your lives.!”

“One can command a fantasy,” said August Shackleton. “Black man fantasy, I command that you get the half of my wife out of that dying creature and put her together again.”

“Oh, white people on dope, I cannot do this,” the black man moaned.

“She is dead. And you joke and drink Green Bird and Bomib, and hoot like demented children in a dream.”

“We are in a dream, and you are of the dream,” Shackleton said easily. “And we may experiment with our dream creatures. That is our purpose here. Here, catch a bottle of Roman Bomb!” and he threw it to the black man, who caught it.

“Drink it,” said Shackleton. “I am interested in seeing whether a dream figure can make incursion on physical substance.”

“Oh, white people on dope,” the black man moaned. “The watering place is no place for you to be. You excite the animals, and then they kill. When they are excited it is danger to me also who usually move among them easily. I have to kill the crocodile who is my friend. I do not want to kill others. I do not want more of you to be killed.”

The black man was booted and jacketed quite in the manner of a hunting store outing, this possibly by the care at imagining of Boyle who loved hunting rig. The black Mummings-Night mask was contorted in agony and apprehension, but the black man did drink the Roman Bomb nervously the while he begged them to be gone from that place.

“You will notice that the skull form is quite human and the bearing completely erect,” Linter said. “You will notice also that he is less hairy than we are and is thick of lip, while the great ape is more hairy and thin of lip. I had imagined them to be the same creature differently interpreted.”

“No, you imagine them to be as they appear,” Shackleton said. “It is Your imagining of these two creatures that we are watching.”

“But notice the configuration of the tempora and the mandible shape,” Linter protested, “— not what I expected. “

“You are the only one of us who knows about tempora and mandible shape,” said Shackleton. “I tell you that it is your own imagery. He is structured by you, given the conventional Mummings-Night black-mask by all of us, clothed by Boyle, and speeches by Luna Boyle. His production is our joint effort. Watch it, everyone! It becomes dangerous now, even explosive! Man, I’m getting as hysterical as my wife! The dream is so vivid that it has its hooks in me. Ah, it’s a great investigative experience, but I doubt if I’ll want to return to this particular experience again. Green perdition! But it does become dangerous! Watch out, everyone!”

Ah, it had become wild: a hooting and screaming and bawling wild



Africa bedlam, a green and tawny dazzle of fast-moving color, pungent annual stench of fear and murder, and smell of human fear.

A lion defiled the watering place, striking down a horned buck in the muddy shallows and going muzzle-deep into the hot-colored gore. A hippo erupted out of the water, a behemoth from the depths. Giraffes erected like crazily articulated derricks and galloped ungainly through the bosage.

“Enough of this!” cried Mintgreen Linter. Frightened, she took the lead, incanting:

“That the noontime nightmare pass! The crocodile-dragon and the behemoth.”

“We abjure them, we abjure them,” they all chanted in various voices.

“That the black man and the black ape pass, and all black things of the black-green land.”

“We abjure them, we abjure them,” they chanted. But the black man was already down under the feet and horns of a buffalo creature, dead, and his last rifle shot still echoing. He had tried to prevent the buffalo from upsetting the teetering bole and dumping all the white people into the murder swamp. The great ape was also gone, terrified, back to his high-grass savannas. Many of the other creatures had disappeared or become faint, and there was again the tang of salt water and of distant hot-sand beaches.

“That the lion be gone who roars by day,” Luna Boyle took up the incantation, “and the leopard who is Pan-Ther, the all-animal of grisly mythology. That the crushing snakes be gone, and the giant ostrich, and the horse in the clown suit.”

“We abjure them all, we abjure them all,” everybody chanted.

“That the True Believer form again beneath our feet in the structure we call see and know,” August Shackleton incanted.

“We conjure it up, we conjure it up,” they chanted, and the True Believer rose again barely above the threshold of the senses.

“That the illicit continents fade, and all the baleful islands of our writhing under-minds!” Boyle blurted in some trepidation.

“We abjure them, we abjure them,” they all chanted contritely. And the illicit Africa had now become quite fragile, while the Cinnamon Coast of South Libya started to form as if behind green glass.

“Let us finish it! It lingers unhealthily!” Shackleton spoke loudly with

resolve. "Let us drop our reservations! That we dabble no more in this partictilar illicitness! That we go no more hungering after strange geographies that are not of proper world! That we seal off the unsettling things inside us!"

"We seal them off, we seal them off," they chanted.

And it was finished.

They were on the True Believer, sailing in all easterly direction off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. To the north was that lovely coast with its wonderful beaches and remarkable hotels. To the south and east were the white-topped waves that went on for ever and ever. It was over with, but the incantation had shaken them all with the sheer psychic power of it.

"Justina isn't with us," Luna Boyle said nervously. "She isn't on the True Believer anywhere. Do you think something has happened to her? Will she come back?"

"Of course she'll come back," August Shackleton purred. "She was truant from a seance for two days once. Oh, she'll have some good ones to tell when she does come back, and I'll rather enjoy the vacation from her. I love her, but a man married to an outre wife needs a rest from it sometimes."

"Bill look, look!" Luna Boyle cried. "Oh, she's impossible! She always did carry an antic too fir. That's in bad taste."

The severed lower half of Justina Shackleton floated in the clear blue water beside the True Believer. It was bloodied and gruesome and was being attacked by slashing fishes.

"Oh, stop it, Justina!" August Shackleton called angrily. "What a woman! Ah, I see it now. We turn to land."

It was the opening to the Yacht Basin, the channel through the beach shallows to the fine harbor behind. They tacked, they turned, they nosed in towards the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The world was itact again, one whole and perfect jewel, lying wonderful to the north of them. And south was only great ocean and great equator and empty places of the under-mind. The True Believer came to port passage with the perfect bright noontime on all things. tree," Justina screamed warning front the swamp. "There's ten meters of it reaching down for you."

"Conjure the crocodile," Shackleton intoned. "Not the little crocodile of the River of Egypt, but the big crocodile of deeper Africa that can

swallow a cow. “

“We conjure it, we imagine it, we evoke it, and the swamps and

## CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK

Up in the Big Little country there is an up-thrust, a chimney rock that is half fallen against a newer hill. It is formed of what is sometimes called Dawson Sandstone and is interlaced with tough shell. It was formed during the glacial and recent ages in the bottom lands of Crow Creek and Green River when these streams (at least five times) were iniglity rivers.

The chimney rock is only a little older than mankind, only a little younger than grass. Its formation had been up-thrust and then eroded away again, all but such harder parts as itself and other chimneys and blocks.

A party of five persons came to this place where the chimney rock had fallen against a still newer hill. The people of the party did not care about the deep limestone below: they were not geologists. they did care about the newer hill (it was man-made) and they did care a little about the rock chimney; they were archaeologists.

Here was time heaped up, bulging out in casing and accumulation, and not in line sequence. And here also was striated and banded time, grown tall, and then shattered and broken.

The five party members came to the site early in the afternoon, bringing the working trailer down a dry creek bed. They unloaded many things and made a camp there. It wasn't really necessary to make a camp on the ground. There was a good motel two miles away on the highway; there was a road along the ridge above. They could have lived in comfort and made the trip to the site in five minutes every morning. Terrence Burdock, however, believed that one could not get the feel of a digging unless he lived on the ground with it day and night.

The five persons were Terrence Burdock, his wife Ethyl, Robert Derby, and Howard Steinleser: four beautiful and balanced people. And Magdalen Mobley who was neither beautiful nor balanced. But she was electric; she was special. They rouched around in the formations a little after they had made camp and while there was still light. All of them had seen the formations before and had guessed that there was promise in them.

“That peculiar fluting in the broken chimney is almost like a core sample,” Terrence said, “and it differs from the rest of it. It's like a lightning bolt through the whole length. It's already exposed for us. I

believe we will remove the chimney entirely. It covers the perfect access for the slash in the mound, and it is the mound in which we are really interested. But we'll study the chimney first. It is so available for study."

"Oh, I can tell you everything that's in the chimney," Magdalen said crossly. "I can tell you everything that's in the mound too."

"I wonder why we take the trouble to dig if you already know what we will find," Ethyl sounded archly.

"I wonder too," Magdalen grumbled. "But we will need the evidence and the artifacts to show. You can't get appropriations without evidence and artifacts. Robert, go kill that deer in the brush about forty yards north-east of the chimney. We may as well have deer meat if we're living primitive."

"This isn't deer season," Robert Derby objected. "And there isn't any deer there. Or, if there is, it's down in the draw where you couldn't see it. And if there's one there, it's probably a doe."

"No, Robert, it is a two-year-old buck and a very big one. Of course it's in the draw where I can't see it. Forty yards northeast of the chimney would have to be in the draw. If I could see it, the rest of you could see it too. Now go kill it! Are you a man or a mus microtuss? Howard, cut poles and set up a tripod to string and dress the deer on. "

"You had better try the thing, Robert," Ethyl Burdock said, "or we'll have no peace this evening."

Robert Derby took a carbine and went north-eastward of the chimney, descending into the draw near it forty yards. There was the high ping of the carbine shot. And, after some moments, Robert returned with a curious grin.

"You didn't miss him, Robert, you killed him," Magdalen called loudly. "You got him with a good shot through the throat and up into the brain when he tossed his head high like they do. Why didn't you bring him? Go back and get him! "

"Get him? I couldn't even lift the thing. Terrence and Howard, come with me and we'll lash it to a pole and get it here somehow. "

"Oh, Robert, you're out of your beautiful mind," Magdalen chided. "It only weighs a hundred and ninety pounds. Oh, I'll get it."

Magdalen Mobley went and got the big buck. She brought it back, carrying it listless across her shoulders and getting herself bloodied, stopping sometimes to examine rocks and kick them with her foot,

coming on easily with her load. It looked as if it might weigh two hundred and fifty pounds; but if Magdalen said it weighed a hundred and ninety, that is what it weighed.

Howard Steinleser had cut poles and made a tripod. He knew better than not to. They strung the buck up, skinned it off, ripped up its belly, drew it, and worked it over in an almost professional manner.

“Cook it, Ethyl,” Magalen said.

Later, as they sat on the ground around the fire and it had turned dark, Ethyl brought the buck’s brains to Magdalen, messy and not half cooked, believing that she was playing an evil trick. And Magdalen ate them avidly. They were her due. She had discovered the buck.

If you wonder how Magdalen knew what itivisible things were where, so did the other members of the party always wonder.

“It bedevils me sometimes why I am the only one to notice the analogy between historical geology and depth psychology,” Terrence Burdock mused as they grew lightly profound around the campfire. “The isostatic principle applies to the mind and the under-mind as well as it does to the surface and under-surface of the earth. The mind has its erosions and weatherings going on along with its deposits and accumulations. It also has its upthrusts and its stresses. It floats on a similar magma. In extreme cases it has its volcanic eruptions and its mountain-building.”

“And it has its glaciations,” Ethyl Burdock said, and perhaps she was looking at her husband in the dark.

“The mind has its hard sandstone, sometimes transmuted to quartz, or half-transmuted into flint, from the drifting and floating sand of daily events It has its shale from the old mud of daily ineptitudes and inertias. It has limestone out of its more vivid experiences, for lime is the remnant of what was once animate: and this limestone may be true marble if it is the deposit of rich enough emotions or even travertine if it has bubbled sufficiently though agonized and evocative rivers of the under-mind. The mind has its sulphur and its gemstones —” “Terrence bubbled on sufficiently, and Magdalen cut him off.

“Say simply that we have rocks in our heads,” she said. “But they’re random rocks, I tell you, and the same ones keep coming back. It isn’t the same with us as it is with the earth. The world gets new rocks all the time. But it’s the same people who keep turning up, and the same minds. Damn, one of the samest of them just turned up again! I wish he’d leave

the alone. The answer is still no.”

Very often Magdalen said things that made no sense. Ethyl Burdock assured herself that neither her husband, nor Robert, nor Howard, had slipped over to Magdalen in the dark. Ethyl was jealous of the chunky and surly girl.

“I am hoping that this will be as rich as Spiro Mound,” Howard Steinleser hoped. “It could be, you know. I’m told that there was never a less prepossessing site than that, or a trickier one. I wish we had someone who had dug at Spiro.”

“On, he dug at Spiro,” Magdalen said with contempt.

“He? Who?” Terrence Burdock asked. “No one of us was at Spiro. Magdalen, you weren’t even born yet when that mound was opened. What could you know about it?”

“Yeah, I remember him at Spiro,” Magdalen said, “always turning up his own things and pointing them out.”

“Were you at Spiro?” Terrence suddenly asked a piece of darkness. For some time, they had all been vaguely aware that there were six, not five, persons around the fire.

“Yeah, I was at Spiro,” the man said. “I dig there. I dig at a lot of the digs. I dig real well, and I always know when we come to something that will be important. You give me a job.”

“Who are you?” Terrence asked him. The man was pretty visible now. The flame of the fire seemed to leap towards him as if he compelled it,

“Oh, I’m just a rich old poor man who keeps following and hoping and asking. There is one who is worth it all forever, so I solicit that one forever. And sometimes I am other things. Two hours ago I was the deer in the draw It is an odd thing to munch one’s own flesh.” “And the man was munching a joint of the deer, unasked.

“Him and his damn cheap poetry!” Magdalen cried angrily.

“What’s your name?” Terrence asked him.

“Manypenny. Anteros Manypenny is my name forever.”

“What are you?”

“On, just Indian. Shawnee, Choc, Creek, Anadarko, Caddo and pre-Caddo. Lots of things.”

“How could anyone be pre-Caddo?”

“Like me. I am.”

“Is Anteros a Creek name?”

“No. Greek. Man, I am a going Jessie, I am one digging man! I show you tomorrow. “

Four more hoe cuts, and Anteros did come to them. He uncovered two large points and one small one, spear heads and arrow head. Lanceolate they were, with ribbon flaking. They were late Folsom, or they were proto-Plano; they were what you will.

“This cannot be,” Steinleser groaned. “They’re the missing chips, the transition pieces. They fill the missing places too well. I won’t believe it. I’d hardly believe it if mastodon bones were found on the same level here.”

“In a moment,” said Anteros, beginning to use the hoe again. “Hey, those old beasts did smell funny! An elephant isn’t in it with them. And a lot of it still clings to their bones. Will a sixth thoracic bone do? I’m pretty sure that’s what it is. I don’t know where the rest of the animal is. Probably somebody gnawed the thoracic here. Nine hoe cuts, and then very careful. “

Nine hoe cuts; and then Atiteros, using a masons’ trowel, unearthed the old gnawed bone very carefully. Yes, Howard said almost ailgrily, it was a sixth thoracic of a mastodon. Robert Derby said it was a fifth or sixth; it is not easy to tell.

“Leave the digging for a while, Anteros,” Steinleser said. “I want to record and photograph and take a few measurements here. “

Terrence Burdock and Magdalen Mobley were working at the bottom of the chimney rock, at the bottom of the fluting that ran the whole height of it like a core sample.

“Get Anteros over here and see what he can uncover in sixty seconds,” Terrence offered.

“On him! He’ll just uncover some of his own things.”

“What do you mean, his own things? Nobody could have made all intrusion here. It’s hard sandstone.”

“And harder flint here,” Magdalen said. “I might have known it. Pass the damned thing up. I know just about what it says anyhow. “

“What it says? What do you mean? But it is marked! And it’s large and dressed rough. Who’d carve in flint?”

“Somebody real stubborn, just like flint,” Magdalen said. “All right then, let’s have it out. Anteros! Get this out in one piece. And do it without shattering it or tumbling the whole thing down on us. He can do



it, you know, Terrence. He can do things like that. “

“What do you know about his doings, Magdalen? You never saw or heard about the poor man till last night.”

“Oh well, I know that it’ll turn out to be the same damned stuff.” Anteros did get it out without shattering it or bringing down the chimney column. A cleft with a digging bar, three sticks of the stuff and a cap, an he touched the leads to the battery when he was almost on top of the charge. The blast, it sounded as if the whole sky were falling down in them, and some of those sky-blocks were quite large stones. The ancients wondered why fallen pieces of the sky should always be dark rock-stuff and never sky-blue clear stuff. The answer is that it is only pieces of the night sky that ever fall, even though they may sometimes be most of the daytime in filling, such is the distance. And the blast that Anteros set off did bring down rocky chunks of the night sky even though it was broad daylight. They brought down darker rocks than any of which the chimney was composed.

Still, it was a small blast. The chimney tottered but did not collapse. It settled back uneasily on its base. And the flint block was out in the clear.

“A thousand spearheads and arrow heads could be shattered and chipped out of that hunk,” Terrence marveled. “That flint block would have been a primitive fortune for a primitive man.”

“I had several such fortunes,” Anteros said dully, “and this one I preserved and dedicated.”

They had all gathered around it.

“Oh the poor man!” Ethyl suddenly exclaimed. but she was not looking at any of the men. She was looking at the stone.

“I wish he’d get off that kick,” Magdalen sputtered angrily. “I don’t care how rich he is. I can pick up better stuff than him in the alleys.”

“What are the women chirping about?” Terrence asked. “But those do look like true glyphs. Almost like Aztec, are they not, Steinleser?”

“Nahust-Tanoan, cousins-german to the Aztec, or should I say cousins-yaqui?”

“Call it anything, but call you read it?”

“Probably. Give me eight or ten hours on it and I should come up with a contingent reading of many of the glyphs. We can hardly expect a rational rendering of the message, however. All Nahust-Tanoan translations so far have been gibberish.”

“And remember, Terrence, that Steinleser is a slow reader,” Magdalen said spitefully. “And he isn’t very good at interpreting other signs either.”

Steinleser was sullen and silent. How had his face come to bear those deep livid claw-marks today?

They moved a lot of rock and rubble that morning, took quite a few pictures, wrote up bulky notes. There were constant finds as the divided party worked up the shag-slash in the mound and the core-flute of the chimney. There were no more really startling discoveries; no more turned pots of the proto-Plano period; how could there be? There were no more predicted and perfect points of the late Folsom, but there were broken and unpredictable points. No other mastodon thoracic was found, but belies were uncovered of bison latifrons, of dire wolf, of coyote, of man. There were some anomalies in the relationship of the things discovered, but it was not as fishy as it had been in the early morning, not as fishy as when Anteros had announced and then dug out the shards of the pot, the three points, the mastodon bone. The things now were as authentic as they were expected, and yet their very profusion had still the smell of a small fish.

And that Anteros was one digging man. He moved the sand, he moved the stone, he missed nothing . And at noon he disappeared.

An hour later he reappeared in a glossy station wagon, coming out of a thicketed ravine where no one would have expected a way. He had been to town. He brought a variety of cold cuts, cheeses, relishes and pastries, a couple of cases of cold beer, and some V.O.

“I thought you were a poor man, Anteros,” Terrence chided.

“I told you that I was a rich old poor man. I have nine thousand acres of grassland, I have three thousand head of cattle, I have alfalfa land and clover land and corn land and hay-grazer land —”

“On, knock it off!” Magdalen snapped.

“I have other things,” Anteros finished sullenly.

They ate, they rested, they worked the afternoon. Magdalen worked as swiftly and solidly as did Anteros. She was young, she was stocky, she was light-burned-dark. She was not at all beautiful (Ethyl was). She could have any man there any time she wanted to (Ethyl couldn’t). She was Magdalen, the often unpleasant, the mostly casual, the suddenly intense one. She was the tension of the party, the string of the bow.

“Anteros!” she called sharply just at sundown.

“The turtle?” he asked. “The turtle that is under the ledge out of the current where the back-water curls in reverse? But he is fit and happy and he has never harmed anything except for food or fun. I know you do not want me to get that turtle.”

“I do! There’s eighteen pounds of him. He’s fat. He’ll be good. Only eighty yards, where the bank crumbles down to Green River, under the lower ledge that’s shale that looks like slate, two feet deep — “

“I know where he is. I will go get the fat turtle.” Anteros said. “I myself am the fat turtle. I am the Green River.” He went to get it.

“On that damned poetry of his!” Magdalen spat when he was gone.

Anteros brought back the fat turtle. He looked as if he’d weigh twenty-five pounds; but if Magdalen said he weighed eighteen pounds, then it was eighteen.

“Start cooking, Ethyl,” Magdalen said. Magdalen was a mere undergraduate girl permitted on the digging by sheer good fortune. The others of the party were all archaeologists of the moment. Magdalen had no right to give orders to anyone, except her born right.

“I don’t know how to cook a turtle,” Ethyl complained.

“Anteros will show you how.”

“The late evening smell of newly exposed excavation!” Terrence Burdock burred as they lounged around the camp-fire a little later, full of turtle and V.O. and feeling rakishly wise. “The exposed age can be guessed by the very timbre of the smell, I believe.”

“Timbre of the smell! What is your nose wired up to?” from Magdalen.

And, indeed, there was something time-evocative about the smell of the diggings; cool, at the same time musty and musky, ripe with old stratified water and compressed death. Stratified time.

“It helps if you already know what the exposed age is,” said Howard Steinleser. “Here there is an anomaly. The chimney sometimes acts as if it were younger than the mound. The chimney cannot be young enough to include written rock, but it is.”

“Archaeology is made up entirely of anomalies,” said Terrence, “rearranged to make them fit in a fluke pattern. There’d be no system to it otherwise.”

“Every science is made up entirely of anomalies rearranged to fit,” said Robert Derby. “Have you unriddled the glyph-stone, Howard?”

“Yes, pretty well. better than I expected. Charles August can verify it,

of course, when we get it back to the University. It is a non-royal, non-tribal, non-warfare, non-hunt declaration. It does not come under any of the usual radical signs, any of the categories. It can only be categorized as uncategorized or personal. The translation will be rough.”

“Rocky is the word,” said Magdalen.

“On with it, Howard,” Ethyl cried.

“You are the freedom of wild pigs in the sour-grass, and the nobility of badgers. You are the brightness of serpents and the soaring of vultures. You are passion of mesquite bushes on fire with lightning. You are serenity of toads.”

“You’ve got to admit he’s got a different line,” said Ethyl. “Your own love notes were less acrid, Terrence.”

“What kind of thing is it, Steinleser?” Terrence questioned. “It must have a category.”

“I believe Ethyl is right. It’s a love poem. ‘You are the water in rock cisterns and the secret spiders in that water. You are the dead coyote lying half in the stream, and you are the old entrapped dreams of the coyote’s brains oozing liquid through the broken eye socket. You are the happy ravens about that broken socket.’”

“On, hold it, Steinleser,” Robert Derby cried. “You can’t have gotten all that from scratches on flint. What is ‘entrapped dreams’ in Nahuatl glyph-writing?”

“The solid-person sign next to the hollow-person sign, both enclosed in the night sign — that has always been interpreted as the dream glyph. And here the dream glyph is enclosed in the glyph of the dead-fall trap. Yes, I believe it means entrapped dreams. To continue: ‘You are the cornworm in the dark heart of the corn, the naked small bird in the nest. You are the pustules on the sick rabbit, devouring life and flesh and turning it into your own serum. You are stars compressed into charcoal. But you cannot give, you cannot take. Once again you will be broken at the foot of the cliff, and the word will remain unsaid in your swollen and purple tongue.’”

“A love poem, perhaps, but with a difference,” said Robert Derby.

“I never was able to do his stuff and I tried, I really tried,” Magdalen moaned.

“Here is the change of person-subject shown by the canted-eye glyph linked with the self-glyph,” Steinleser explained. “It is now a first-person

talk. ‘I own ten-thousand back-loads of corn. I own gold and beans and nine buffalo horns full of watermelon seeds. I own the loin cloth that the sun wore on his fourth journey across the sky. Only three loin cloths in the world are older and more valued than this. I cry out to you in a big voice like the hammering of herons’ (that sound-verb-particle is badly translated, the hammer being not a modern pounding hammer but a rock angling, chipping hammer) ‘and the belching of buffaloes. My love is sinewy as entwined snakes, it is steadfast as the sloth, it is like a feathered arrow shot into your abdomen — such is my love. Why is my love unrequited?’“

“I challenge you, Steinleser,” Terrence Burdock cut in. “What is the glyph for ‘unrequited’?”

“The glyph of the extended hand — with all the fingers bent backwards. It goes on ‘I roar to you. Do not throw yourself down. You believe you are on the hanging sky bridge, but you are on the terminal cliff. I grovel before you. I am no more than dog-dropping.’“

“You’ll notice he said that and not me,” Magdalen burst out. There was always a fundamental incoherence about Magdalen.

“Ah — continue, Steinleser,” said Terrence. “The girl is daft, or she dreams out loud.”

“That is all of the inscriptions, Terrence, except for a final glyph which I don’t understand. Glyph writing takes a lot of room. That’s all the stone would hold.”

“What is the glyph that you don’t understand, Howard?”

“It’s the spear-thrower glyph entwined with the time glyph. It sometimes means ‘flung forward or beyond.’ But what does it mean here?”

“It means ‘continued,’ dummy. ‘Continued,’” Magdalen said. “Do not fear. There’ll be more stories.”

“I think it’s beautiful,” said Ethyl Burdock, “— in its own context, of course. “

“Then why don’t you take him on, Ethyl, in his own context, of course?” Magdalen asked. “Myself, I don’t care how many back-loads of corn he owns. I’ve had it.”

“Take whom on, dear?” Ethyl asked. “Howard Steinleser can interpret the stones, but who can interpret our Magdalen?”

“Oh, I can read like a rock,” Terrence Burdock smiled. But he couldn’t.

But it had fastened on them. It was all about them and through them: the brightness of serpents and the serenity of toads, the secret spiders in the water, the entrapped dreams oozing through the broken eye socket, the pustules of the sick rabbit, the belching of the buffalo, and the arrow shot into the abdomen. And around it all was the night smell of flint and turned earth and chuckling streams, the mustiness, and the special muskiness which bears the name Nobility of Badgers.

They talked archeology and myth talk. Then it was steep night, and the morning of the third day.

Oh, the sample digging went well. This was already a richer mound than Spiro, though the gash in it was but a small promise of things to come. And the curious twin of the mound, the broken chimney, confirmed and confounded and contradicted. There was time going wrong in the chimney, or at least in the curious fluted core of it; the rest of it was normal enough, and sterile enough.

Anteros worked that day with a soft sullenness, and Magdalen brooded with a sort of lightning about her.

“Beads, glass beads!” Terrence Burdock exploded angrily. “All right! Who is the hoaxer in our midst? I will not tolerate this at all.” Terrence had been angry of face all day. He was clawed deeply, as Steinleser had been the day before, and he was sour on the world.

“There have been glass-bead caches before, Terrence, hundreds of them,” Robert Daly said softly.

“There have been hoaxers before, hundreds of them,” Terrence howled. “These have ‘Hong Kong Contemporary’ written all over them, damn cheap glass beads sold by the pound. They have no business in a stratum oif around the year seven hundred. All right, who is guilty?”

“I don’t believe that any one of us is guilty, Terrence,” Ethyl put in milsly. “They are found four feet in from the slant surface of the mound. Why, we’ve cut through three hundred years of vegetable loam to get them, and certainly the surface was eroded beyond that.”

“We are scientists,” said Steinleser. “We find these. Others have found such. Let us consider the improbabilities of it.”

It was noon, so they ate and rested and considered the improbabilities. Anteros had brought them a great joint of white pork, and they made sandwiches and drank beer and ate pickles.

“You know,” said Robert Derby, “that beyond the rank impossibility of

glass beads found so many times where they could not be found, there is a real mystery about all early Indian beads, whether of bone, stone, or antler. There are millions and millions of these find beads with pierced holes finer than any piercer every found. There are residues, there are centers of every other Indian industry, and there is evolution of every other tool. Why have there been these millions of pierced beads, and never one piercer? There was not technique to make so fine a piercer. How were they done?"

Magdalen giggled. "Bead-spitter," she said.

"Bead-spitter! You're out of your fuzzy mind," Terrence erupted. "That's the sillierst and least sophisticated of all Indian legends."

"But it is the legend," said Robert Derby, "the legend of more than thirty separate tribes. The Carib Indians of Cuba said that they got their beads from Bead-spitters. The Indians of Panama told Balboa the same thing. The Indians of the pueblos told the same story to Coronado. Every Indian community had an Indian who was its Bead-spitter. There are Creek and Alabama and Kaosati stories of Bead-spitter; see Swanton's collections. And his stories were taken down within living memory.

"More than that, when European trade-beads were first introduced, there is one account of all Indian receiving some and saying 'I will take some to Bead-spitter. If he sees them, he can spit them too.' And that Bead-spitter did then spit them by the bushels. There was never any other Indian account of the origin of their beads. All were spit by a Bead-spitter."

"Really, this is very unreal," Ethyl said. Really it was.

"Hog hokey! A bead-spitter of around the year seven hundred could not spit future beads, he could not spit cheap Hong Kong glass beads of the present time!" Terrence was very angry.

"Pardon me, yes sir, he could," said Anteros. "A Bead-spitter can spit future beads, if he faces North when he spits. That has always been known."

Terrence was angry, he fumed and poisoned the day for them, and the claw marks on his face stood out livid purple. He was angrier yet when he said that the curious dark capping rock on top of the chimney was dangerous, that it would fall and kill someone; and Anteros said that there was no such capping rock on the chimney, that Terrence's eyes were deceiving him, that Terrence should go sit in the shade and rest.

And Terrence became excessively angry when he discovered that Magdalen was trying to hide something that she had discovered in the fluted core of the chimney. It was a large and heavy shale-stone, too heavy even for Magdalen's puzzling strength. She had dragged it out of the chimney flute, tumbled it down to the bottom, and was trying to cover it with rocks and scarp.

"Robert, mark the extraction point!" Terrence called loudly. "It's quite plain yet. Magdalen, stop that! Whatever it is, it must be examined now."

"Oh, it's just more of the damned same thing! I wish he'd let me alone. With his kind of money he can get plenty of girls. Besides, it's private, Terrence. You don't have any business reading it."

"You are hysterical, Magdalen, and you may have to leave the digging site."

"I wish I could leave. I can't. I wish I could love. I can't. Why isn't it enough that I die?"

"Howard, spend the afternoon on this," Terrence ordered. "It has writing of a sort on it. If it's what I think it is, it scares me. It's too recent to be in any eroded chimney rock formation, Howard, and it comes from far below the top. Read it."

"A few hours on it and I may come up with something. I never saw anything like it either. What did you think it was, Terrence?"

"What do you think I think it is? It's much later than the other, and that one was impossible. I'll not be the one to confess myself crazy first."

Howard Steinleser went to work on the incised stone; and two hours before sundown they brought him another one, a gray soap-stone block from higher up. Whatever this was covered with, it was not at all the same thing that covered the shale-stone.

And elsewhere things went well, too well. The old fishiness was back on it. No series of finds could be so perfect, no petrification could be so well ordered.

"Robert," Magdalen called down to Robert Derby just at sunset, "in the high meadow above the shore, about four hundreds yards down, just past the old fence line —"

"— there is a badger hole, Magdalen. Now you have me doing it, seeing invisible things at a distance. And if I take a carbine and stroll down there quietly, the badger will stick his head out just as I get there (I being strongly downwind of him), and I'll blame him between the eyes.



He'll be a big one, fifty pounds."

"Thirty. Bring him, Robert. You're showing a little understanding at last."

"But, Magdalen, badger is rampant meat. It's seldom eaten."

"May not the condemned girl have what she wishes for her last meal? Go get it, Robert."

Robert went. The voice of the little carbine was barely heard at that distance. Soon, Robert brought back the dead badger.

"Cook it, Ethyl," Magdalen ordered.

"Yes, I know. And if I don't know how, Anteros will show me." But Anteros was gone. Robert found him on a sun-down knoll with his shoulders hunched. The odd man was sobbing silently and his face seemed to be made out of dull pumice stone. But he came back to aid Ethyl in preparing the fadger.

"If the first of today's stones scared you, the second should have lifted the hair right off your hear, Terrence," Howard Steinleser said.

"It does, it does. All the stones are too recent to be in a chimney formation, but this last one is an insult. It isn't two hundred years old, but there's a thousand years of strata above it. What time is deposited here?"

They had eaten rampant badger meat and drunk inferior whiskey (which Anteros, who had given it to them, didn't know was inferior), and the muskiness was both inside them and around them. The camp-fire sometimes spit angrily with small explosions, and its glare reached high when it did so. By one such leaping glare, Terrence Burdock saw that the curious dark capping rock was once more on top of the chimney. He thought he had seen it there in the daytime; but it had not been there after he had set in the shade and rested, and it had absolutely not been there when he climbed the chimney itself to be sure.

"Let's have the second chapter and then the third, Howard," Ethyl said. "It's neater that way."

"Yes, tell, the second chapter (the first and lowest apparently the earliest rock we came on today) is written in a language that no one ever saw written before; and yet it's no great trouble to read it. Even Terrence guessed what it was and it scared him. It is Anadarko-Caddo hand-talk graven in stone. It is what is called the Sign Language of the Plains Indians copied down in formalized pictograms. And it has to be very recent, within the last three hundred years. Hand-talk was fragmentary at

the first coming of the Spanish, and well developed at the first coming of the French. It was all explosive development, as such things go, worked out within a hundred years. This rock has to be younger than its situs, but it was absolutely found in place.”

“Read it, Howard, read it,” Robert Derby called. Robert was feeling fine and the rest of them were gloomy tonight.

“I own three hundred ponis,” Steinleser read the rock out of his memory. “I own two days’ ride north and east and South, and one day’s ride west. I give you all. I blast out with a big voice like fire in tall trees, like the explosion of crowning pine trees. I cry like closing-in wolves, like the high voice of the lion, like the hoarse scream of torn calves. Do you not destroy yourself again! You are the dew on crazy-weed in the morning. You are the swift crooked wings of the nighthawk, the dainty feet of the skunk, you are the juice of the sour squash. Why can you not take or give? I am the hump-backed bull of the high plains, I am the river itself and the stagnant pools left by the river, I am the raw earth and the rocks. Come to me, but do not come so violently as to destroy yourself.”

“Ah, that was the text of the first rock of the day, the Anadarko-Caddo hard-talk graven in stone. And final pictograms which I don’t understand: a shot-arrow sign, and a boulder beyond.”

“Continued on next rock’ of course,” said Robert Derby. “Well, why wasn’t hand-talk ever written down? The signs are simple and easily stylized and they were understood by many different tribes. It would have been natural to write it.”

“Alphabetical writing was in the region before hand-talk was well-developed,” Terrence Burdock said. “In fact, it was the coming of the Spanish that gave the impetus to hand-talk. It was really developed for communication between Spanish and Indian, not between Indian and Indian. And yet, I believe, hand-talk was written down once; it was the beginning of the Chinese pictographs. And there also it had its beginning as communication between differing peoples. Depend on it, if all mankind had always been of a single language, there would never have been any written language developed at all. Writing always began as a bridge, and there had to be some chasm for it to bridge.”

“We have one to bridge here,” said Steinleser. “That whole chimney is full of rotten smoke. The highest part of it should be older than the lowest part of the mound, since the mound was built on a base eroded away

from the chimney formation. But in many ways they seem to be contemporary. We must all be under a spell here. We've worked two days on this, parts of three days, and the total impossibility of the situation hasn't struck us yet.

"The old Nahuatlan glyphs for Time are the Chimney glyphs. Present time is a lower part of chimney and fire burning it the base. Past time is black smoke from a chimney, and future time is white smoke from a chimney. There was a signature glyph running through our yesterday's stone which I didn't and don't understand. It seemed to indicate something coming down out of the chimney rather than going up it."

"It really doesn't look much like a chimney," Magdalen said.

"And a maiden doesn't look much like dew on crazy-weed in the morning, Magdalen," Robert Derby said, "But we recognize these identities."

They talked awhile about the impossibility of the whole business.

"There are scales on our eyes," Steinleser said. "The fluted core of the chimney is wrong. I'm not even sure the rest of the chimney is right."

"No, it isn't," said Robert Derby. "We can identify most of the strata of the chimney with known periods of the river and stream. I was above and below today. There is one stretch where the sandstone was not eroded at all, where it stands three hundred yards back from the shifted river and is overlaid with a hundred years of loam and sod. There are other sections where the stone is cut away variously. We can tell when most of the chimney was laid down, we can find its correspondences up to a few hundred years ago. But when were the top ten feet of it laid down? There were no correspondences anywhere to that. The centuries represented by the strata of the top of the chimney, people, those centuries haven't happened yet."

"And when was the dark capping rock on top of it all formed —?" Terrence began. "Ah, I'm out of my mind. It isn't there. I'm demented."

"No more than the rest of us," said Steinleser. "I saw it too, I thought, today. And then I didn't see it again."

"The rock-writing, it's like an old novel that I only half remember," said Ethyl.

"On, that's what it is, yes," Magdalen murmured.

"But I don't remember what happened to the girl in it."

"I remember what happened to her, Ethyl," Magdalen said.

“Give us the third chapter, Howard,” Ethyl asked. “I want to see how it comes out. “

“First you should all have whisky for those colds,” Anteros suggested humbly.

“But none of us have colds, “ Ethyl objected.

“You take your own medicinal advice, Ethyl, and I’ll take mine,” Terrence said. “I will have whisky. My cold is not rheum but fear-chill.”

They all had whisky. They talked a while, and some of them dozed.

“It’s late, Howard,” Ethyl said after a while. “Let’s have the next chapter. Is it the last chapter? Then we’ll sleep. We have honest digging to do tomorrow.”

“Our third stone, our second stone of just past, is another and even later form of writing, and it has never been seen in stone before. It is Kiowa picture writing. The Kiowas did their out-turning spiral writing on buffalo skins dressed almost as fine as vellum. In its more sophisticated form (and this is a copy that) is quite late. The Kiowa picture writing probably did not arrive at its excellence until influenced by White artists.”

“How late, Steinleser?” Robert Derby asked.

“Not more than a hundred and fifty years old. But I have never seen it copied in stone before. It simply isn’t stone-styled. There’s a lot of things around here lately that I haven’t seen before.

“Well then, to the text, or should I say the pictography? ‘You fear the earth, you fear rough ground and rocks, you fear moister earth and rotting flesh, you fear the flesh itself, all flesh is rotting flesh. If you love not rotting flesh, you love not at all. You believe the bridge hanging in the sky, the bridge hung by tendrils and woody vines that diminish as they go up and up till they are no thicker than hairs. There is no sky-bridge, you cannot go upon it. Did you believe that the roots of love grow upside down? They come out of deep earth that is old flesh and brains and hearts and entrails, that is old buffalo bowels and snakes’ pizzles, that is black blood and rot and moaning underground. This is old and worn-out and bloody Time, and the roots of love grow out of its gore.’“

“You seem to give remarkable detailed translations of the simple spiral pictures, Steinleser, but I begin to get in the mood of it,” Terrence said.

“Ah, perhaps I cheat a little,” said Steinleser.

“You lie a lot,” Magdalen challenged.

“No I do not. There is some basis for every phrase I’ve used. It goes on: ‘I own twenty-two trade rifles. I own ponies. I own Mexico silver, eight-bit pieces. I am rich in all ways. I give all to you. I cry out with big voice like a bear full of mad-weed, like a bull frog in love, like a stallion rearing against a puma. It is the earth that calls you. I am the earth, woollier than wolves and tougher than rocks. I am the bog earth that sucks you in. You cannot give, you cannot like, you cannot love, you think there is something else, you think there is a sky-bridge you may loiter on without crashing down. I am bristle-boar earth, there is no other. You will come to me in the morning. You will come to me easy and with grace. Or you will come to me reluctant and you be shattered in every bone and member of you. You be broken by our encounter. You be shattered as by a lightning bolt striking up from the earth. I am the red calf which is in the writirigs. I am the rotting red earth. Live in the morning or die in the morning, but remember that love in death is better than no love at all.’”

“Oh brother! Nobody gets that stuff from kid pictures, Steitleser,” Robert Derby moaned.

“Ah well, that’s the end of the spiral picture. And a Kiowa spiral pictograph ends with either all in-sweep or an out-sweep line. This ends with an out-sweep, which means —”

“‘Continued on next rock,’ that’s what it means,” Terrence cried roughly.

“You won’t find the next rocks,” Magdalen said. “They’re hidden, and most of the time they’re not there yet, but they will go on and on. But for all that, you’ll read it in the rocks tomorrow morning. I want it to be over with. Oh, I don’t know what I want!”

“I believe I know what you want tonight, Magdalen,” Robert Derby said.

But he didn’t.

The talk traicd off, the fire burned down, they went to their sleeping sacks.

Then it was long jagged night, and the morning of the fourth day. But wait! In Nahuat-Tanoan legend, the world ends on the fourth morning. All the lives we lived or thought we lived had been but drcains of third night. The loin cloth that the suit wore on the fourth day’s journey was not so valuable as one has made out. It was worn for no more than an

hour or so.

And, in fact, there was something terminal about fourth morning. Anteros had disappeared. Magdalen had disappeared. The chimney rock looked greatly diminished in its bulk (something had gone out of it) and much crazier in its broken height. The sun had come up a garish gray-orange color through fog. The signature -glyph of the first stone dominated the ambient. It was as if something were coming down from the chimney, a horrifying smoke; but it was only noisome morning fog.

No it wasn't. There was something else coming down from the chimney, or from the hidden sky: pebbles, stones, indescribable bits of foul ooze, the less fastidious pieces of sky; a light nightmare rain had begun to fall there; the chimney was apparently beginning to crumble.

"It's the damnedest thing I ever heard about," Robert Derby growled. "Do you think that Magdalen really went off with Anteros?" Derby was bitter and fuming this morning and his face was badly clawed.

"Who is Magdalen? Who is Anteros?" Ethyl Burdock risked.

Terrence Burdock was hooting from high on the mound. "All come up," he called. "Here is a find that will make it all worth while. We'll have to photograph and sketch and measure and record and witness. It's the finest basalt head I've ever seen, man-sized, and I suspect that there's a man-sized body attached to it. We'll soon clean it and clear it. Gah! What a weird fellow he was!"

But Howard Steinleser was studying a brightly colored something that he held in his two hands.

"What is it, Howard? What are you doing?" Derby demanded.

"Ah, I believe this is the next stone in the sequence. The writing is alphabetical but deformed, there is an element missing. I believe it is in modern English, and I will solve the deformity and see it true in a minute. The text of it seems to be —"

Rocks and stories were coming down from the chimney, and fog, amnesic and wit-stealing fog.

"Steinleser, are you all right?" Robert Derby asked with compassion. "That isn't a stone that you hold in your hand."

"It isn't a stone. I thought it was. What is it then?"

"It is the fruit of the Osage Orange tree, the American Meraceous. It isn't a stone, Howard." And the thing was a tough, woody, wrinkled mock-orange, as big as a small melon.

“You have to admit that the wrinkles look a little bit like writing, Robert.”

“Yes, they look a little like writing, Howard. Let us go up where Terrence is bawling for us. You’ve read too many stories. And it isn’t safe here.”

“Why go up, Howard? The other thing is coming down.”

It was the bristled-boar earth reaching up with a rumble. It was a lightning bolt struck upward out of the earth, and it got its prey. There was explosion and roar. The dark capping rock was jerked from the top of the chimney and slammed with terrible force to the earth, shattering with a great shock. And something else that had been on that capping rock. And the whole chimney collapsed about them.

She was broken by the encounter. She was shattered in every bone and member of her. And she was dead.

“Who — who is she?” Howard Steinleser stuttered.

“Oh God! Magdalen, of course!” Robert Derby cried.

“I remember her a little bit. Didn’t understand her. She put out like an evoking moth but she wouldn’t be had. Near clawed the face off me the other night when I misunderstood the signals. She believed there was a sky bridge. It’s in a lot of the mythologies. But there isn’t one, you know. Oh well.”

“The girl is dead! Damnation! What are you grubbing in those stones?”

“Maybe she isn’t dead in them yet, Robert. I’m going to read what’s here before something happens to them. This capping rock that fell and broke, it’s impossible, of course. It’s a stratum that hasn’t been laid down yet. I always did want to read the future and I may never get another chance.”

“You fool! The girl’s dead! Does nobody care? Terrence, stop bellowing about your find. Come down. The girl’s dead.”

“Come up, Robert and Howard,” Terrence insisted. “Leave that broken stuff down there. It’s worthless. But nobody ever saw anything like this.”

“Do come up, men,” Ethyl sang. “Oh, it’s a wonderful place! I never saw anything like it in my life.”

“Ethyl, is the whole morning mad?” Robert Derby demanded as he came up to her. “She’s dead. Don’t you really remember her? Don’t you

remember Magdalen?”

“I’m not sure. Is she the girl down there? Isn’t she the same girl who’s been hanging around here a couple days? She shouldn’t have been playing on that high rock. I’m sorry she’s dead. But just look what we’re uncovering here!”

“Terrence. Don’t you remember Magdalen?”

“The girl down there? She’s a little bit like the girl that clawed the hell out of me the other night. Next time someone goes to town they might mention to the sheriff that there’s a dead girl here. Robert, did you ever see a face like this one? And it digs away to reveal the shoulders. I believe there’s a whole man-sized figure here. Wonderful, wonderful!”

“Terrence, You’re off your head. Well, do you remember Anteros?”

“Certainly, the twin of Eros, but nobody ever made much of the symbol of unsuccessful love. Thunder! That’s the name for him! It fits him perfectly. We’ll call him Anteros.”

Well, it was Aitcros, life-like in basalt stone. His face contorted. He was sobbing soundlessly and frozenly and his shoulders were hunched with emotion. The carving was fascinating in its miserable passion, his stony love unrequited. Perhaps he was more impressive now than he would be when he was cleaned. He was earth, he was earth itself. Whatever period the carving belonged to, it was outstanding in its power.

“The live Anteros, Terrence. Don’t you remember our digging man, Anteros Manypenny?”

“Sure. He didn’t show up for work this morning, did he? Tell him he’s fired.”

“Magdalen is dead! She was one of us! Dammit, she was the main one of us!” Robert Derby cried. Terrence and Etliyl were earless to his outburst. They were busy uncovering the rest of the carving.

And down below, Howard Steinleser was studying dark broken rocks before they would disappear, studying a stratum that hadn’t been laid down yet, reading a foggy future.



## OLD FOOT FORGOT

“Dookh-Doctor, it is a sphairikos patient,” Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. cried happily. “It is a genuine spherical alien patient. You’ve never had one before, not in good faith. I believe it is what you need to distract you from the — ah — happy news about yourself. It is good for a Dookh-Doctor to have a different patient sometimes.”

“Thank you, lay sister. Let it, him, her, fourth case, fifth case or whatever come in. No, I’ve never had a sphairikos in good faith. I doubt if this one is, but I will enjoy the encounter.”

The sphairikos rolled or pushed itself in. It was a big one, either a blubbery kid or a full-grown one. It rolled itself along by extruding and withdrawing pseudopods. And it came to rest grinning, a large translucent rubbery ball of fleeting colors.

“Hello, Dookh-Doctor,” it said pleasantly. “First I wish to extend my own sympathy and that of my friends who do not know how to speak to you for the happy news about yourself. And secondly I have an illness of which you may cure me. “

“But the sphairikoi are never ill,” Dookh-Doctor Drague said dutifully.

How did he know that the round creature was grinning at him? By the colors, of course; by the fleeting colors of it. They were grinning colors.

“My illness is not of the body but of the head,” said the sphairikos.

“But the sphairikoi have no heads, my friend.”

“Then it is of another place and another name, Dookh-Doctor. There is a thing in me suffering. I come to you as a Dookh-Doctor. I have an illness in my Dookh. “

“That is unlikely in a sphairikos. You are all perfectly balanced, each a cosmos unto yourself. And you have a central solution that solves everything. What is your name?”

“Krug Sixteen, which is to say that I am the sixteenth son of Krug; the sixteen fifth case son, of course. Dookh-Doc, the pain is not in me entirely; it is in an old forgotten part of me.”

“But, you sphairikoi have no parts, Krug Sixteen. You are total and indiscriminate entities. How would you have parts?”

“It is one of my pseudopods, extended and then withdrawal in much less than a second long ago when I was a little boy. It protests, it cries, it

wants to come back. It has always bothered me, but now it bothers the intolerably. It screams and moans constantly now.”

“Do not the same ones ever come back?”

“No. Never. Never exactly the same ones. Will exactly the same water ever run past one point in a brook? No. We push them out and we draw them back. And we push them out again, millions of times. But the same one can never come back. There is no identity. But this one cries to come back, and now it becomes more urgent. Dookh-Doc, how can it be? There is not one same molecule in it as when I was a boy. There is nothing of that pseudopod that is left; but parts of it have come out as parts of other pseudopods, and now there can be no parts left. There is nothing remaining of that foot; it has all been absorbed a million times. But it cries out! And I have compassion on it.”

“Krug Sixteen, it may possibly be a physical or mechanical difficulty, a pseudopod imperfectly withdrawn, a sort of rupture whose effects you interpret wrongly. In that case it would be better if you went to your own doctors, or doctor: I understand that there is one.”

“That old fogey cannot help me, Dookh-Doc. And our pseudopods are always perfectly withdrawn. We are covered with the twinkling salve; it is one-third of our bulk. And if we need more of it we can make more of it ourselves; or we call beg some of it from a class four who make it prodigiously. It is the solvent for everything. It eases every possible wound; it makes us round as balls; you should use it yourself, Dookh-Doc. But there is one small foot in me, dissolved long ago, that protests and protests. Oh, the shrieking! The horrible dreams!”

“But the sphairikoi do not sleep and do not dream.”

“Right enough, Dookh-Doc. But there’s an old dead foot of mine that sure does dream loud and woolly.”

The sphairikos was not grinning now. He rolled about softly in apprehension. How did the Dookh-Doctor know that it was apprehension? By the fleeting colors. They were apprehension colors now.

“Krug Sixteen, I will have to study your case,” said the Dookh-Doctor. “I will see if there are any references to it in the literature, though I don’t believe that there are. I will seek for analogy. I will probe every possibility. Can you come back at the same hour tomorrow?”

“I will come back, Dookh-Doc,” Krug Sixteen sighed. “I hate to feel

that small vanished thing crying and trembling.”

It rolled or pushed itself out of the clinic by extruding and then withdrawing pseudopods. The little pushers came out of the goopy surface of the sphairikos and then were withdrawn into it completely. A raindrop falling in a pond makes a much more lasting mark than does the disappearing pseudopod of a sphairikos.

But long ago, in his boyhood, one of the pseudopods of Krug Sixteen had not disappeared completely in every respect.

“There are several jokers waiting,” Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. announced a little later, “and perhaps some valid patients among them. It’s hard to tell.”

“Not another sphairikos?” the Dookh-Doctor asked in sudden anxiety.

“Of course not. The one this morning is the only sphairikos who has ever come. How could there be anything wrong with him? There is never anything wrong with a sphairikos. No, these are all of the other species. Just a regular morning bunch.”

So, except for the visitation of the sphairikos, it was a regular morning at the clinic. There were about a dozen waiting, of the several species; and at least half of them would be jokers. It was always so.

There was a lean and giddy subula. One cannot tell the age or sex of them. But there was a tittering. In all human or inhuman expression, whether of sound, color, radioray or osmerhetor, the titter suggests itself. It is just around the corner, it is just outside, it is subliminal, but it is there somewhere.

“It is that my teeth hurt so terrible,” the subula shrilled so high that the Dookh-Doctor had to go on instruments to hear it. “They are tramping pain. They are agony. I think I will cut my head off. Have you a head-off cutter, Dookh-Doctor?”

“Let me see your teeth,” Dookh-Doctor Druague asked with the beginnings of irritation.

“There is one tooth jump up and down with spike boot,” the subula shrilled. “There is one jag like poisoned needle. There is one cuts like coarse rough saw. There is one burns like little hot fires.”

“Let me see your teeth,” the Dookh-Doctor growled evenly.

“There is one drills holes and sets little blasting powder in them,” the subula shrilled still more highly. “Then he sets them off. Ow! Good

night!”

“Let me see your teeth!!”

“Peeef!” the subula shrilled. The teeth cascaded out, half a bushel of them, ten thousand of them, all over the floor of the clinic.

“Peeef,” the subula screeched again, and ran out of the clinic.

Tittering? (But he should have remembered that the subula have no teeth.) Tittering? It was the laughing of demented horses. It was the jackhammer braying of the dolcus, it was the hysterical giggling of the ophis (they were a half a bushel of shells of the little stink conches and they were already beginning to rot), it was the clown laughter of the arktos (the clinic would never be habitable again; never mind, he would burn it down and build another one tonight).

The jokers, the jokers, they did have their fun with him, and perhaps it did them some good.

“I have this trouble with me,” said a young dolcus, “but it make me so nervous to tell it. Oh, it do make the nervous to tell it to the Dookh-Doc.”

“Do not be nervous,” said the Dookh-Doctor, fearing the worst. “Tell the your trouble in whatever way you can. I am here to serve every creature that is in any trouble or pain whatsoever. Tell it.”

“Oh but it make me so nervous. I perish. I shrivel. I will have accident I am so nervous.”

“Tell me your trouble, my friend. I am here to help.”

“Whoops, whoops, I already have accident! I tell you I am nervous.”

The dolcus urinated largely on the clinic floor. Then it ran out laughing.

The laughing, the shrilling, the braying, the shrill giggling that seemed to scrape the flesh from his bones. (He should have remembered that the dolcus do not urinate; everything comes from them hard and solid.) The hooting, the laughng! it was a bag of green water from the kolmula swamp. Even the aliens gagged at it, and their laughter was of a pungent green sort.

Oh well, there were several of the patients with real, though small, ailments, and there were more jokers. There was the arktos who — (Wait, wait, that particular jokerie cannot be told with human persons present; even the subula and the ophis blushed lavender at the rawness of it. A thing like that can only be told to arktos themselves.) And there was another dolcus who —

Jokers, jokers, it was a typical morning at the clinic.

One does whatever one can for the oneness that is greater than self. In the case of Dookli-Doctor Drague it meant considerable sacrifice. One who works with the strange species here must give up all hope of material reward or material sophistication in his surroundings. But the Dookh-Doctor was a dedicated man.

Oh, the Dookh-Doctor lived pleasantly and with a sort of artful simplicity and dynamic involvement in the small articles of life. He had all excited devotion and balanced intensity for corporate life.

He lived in small houses of giolach-weed, woven with careful double-rappel. He lived in each one for seven days only, and then burned it and scattered the ashes, taking always one bitter glob of them on his tongue for reminder of the fleetingness of temporal things and the wonderfulness of the returning. To live in one house for more than seven days is to become dull and habitual; but the giolach-weed will not burn well till it has been cut and plaited for seven days, so the houses set their own terms. One half day to build, seven days to inhabit, one half day to burn ritually and scatter, one renewal night under the speir-sky.

The Dookh-Doctor ate raibe, or he ate innuin or ull or piorra when they were in season. And for the nine days of each year when none of these were in season, he ate nothing at all.

His clothing he made himself of colg. His paper was of the pailme plant. His printer used buaf ink and shaved slinn stone. Everything that he needed he made for himself from things found wild in the hedgerows. He took nothing from the cultivated land or from the alien peoples. He was a poor and dedicated servant.

Now he stacked some of the needful things from the clinic, and Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. took others of them to her own giolach house to keep till the next day. Then the Dookh-Doctor ritually set his clinic on fire, and a few moments later his house. This was all symbol of the great nostos, the returning. He recited the great rhapsodies, and other persons of the human kind came by and recited with him.

“That no least fiber of giolach die,” he recited, “that all enter immediately the more glorious and undivided life. That the ashes are the doorway, and every ash is holy. That all become a part of the oneness that is greater than self.

“That no splinter of the giuis floorboards die, that no glob of the

chinking clay die, that no mite or louse in the paiting die. That all become a part of the oneness that is greater than self.”

He burned, he scattered, he recited, he took one glob of bitter ash on his tongue. He experienced vicariously the great synthesis. He ate holy innuin and holy ull. And when it was finished, both of the house and the clinic, when it had come on night and he was homeless, he slept that renewal night under the speir-sky.

And in the morning he began to build again, the clinic first, and then the house.

“It is the last of either that I shall ever build,” he said. The happy news about himself was that he was a dying man and that he would be allowed to take the short way out. So he built most carefully with the Last Building Rites. He chinked both the building with special uir clay that would give a special bitterness to the ashes at the time of final burning.

Krug Sixteen rolled along while the Dookh-Doctor still built his final clinic, and the sphairikos helped him in the building while they consulted on the case of the screaming foot. Krug Sixteen could weave and plait and rappel amazingly with his pseudopods; he could bring out a dozen of them, a hundred, thick or thin, whatever was needed, and all of a wonderful dexterity. That globe could weave.

“Does the forgotten foot still suffer, Krug Sixteen?” Dookh-Doctor Drague asked it.

“It suffers, it’s hysterical, it’s in absolute terror. I don’t know where it is; it does not know; and how I know about it at all is a mystery. Have you found any way to help me, to help it?”

“No. I am sorry, but I have not.”

“There is nothing in the literature on this subject?”

“No. Nothing that I can identify as such.”

“And you have not found analogy to it?”

“Yes, Krug Sixteen, ah — in a way I have discovered analogy. But it does not help you. Or me.”

“That is too bad, Dookh-Doc. Well, I will live with it; and the little foot will finally die with it. Do I guess that your case is somewhat the same as mine?”

“No. My case is more similar to that of your lost foot than to you.”

“Well, I will do what I can for myself, and for it. It’s back to the old remedy then. But I am already covered deep with the twinkling salve.”

“So am I, Krug Sixteen, in a like way.”

“I was ashamed of my affliction before and did not mention it. Now, however, since I have spoken of it to you, I have spoken of it to others also. There is some slight help, I find. I should have shot off my big bazoo before.”

“The sphairikoi have no bazoos.”

“Folk-joke, Dookh-Doc. There is a special form of the twinkling salve. My own is insufficient, so I will try the other.”

“A special form of it, Krug Sixteen? I am interested in this. My own salve seems to have lost its effect.”

“There is a girlfriend, Dookh-Doc, or a boyfriend person. How shall I say it? It is a case four person to my case five This person, though promiscuous, is expert. And this person exudes the special stuff in abundance.

“It is the most special of all the twinkling salves, Dookh-Doc, and it solves and dissolves everything. I believe it will reach my forgotten foot, wherever it is, and send it into kind and everlasting slumber. It will know that it is itself that slumbers, and that will be bearable.”

“If I were not — ah — going out of business, Krug Sixteen, I’d get a bit of it and try to analyze it. What is the name of this special case four person?”

“Torchy Twelve is its name.”

“Yes. I have heard of her.”

Everybody now knew that it was the last week in the life of the Dookh-Doctor, and everyone tried to make his happiness still more happy. The morning jokers outdid themselves, especially the arktos. After all, he was dying of an arktos disease, one never fatal to the arktos themselves. They did have some merry and outrageous times around the clinic, and the Dookh-Doctor got the sneaky feeling that he would rather live than die.

He hadn’t, it was plain to see, the right attitude. So Lay Priest Migilia P.T. de C. tried to inculcate the right attitude in him.

“It is the great synthesis you go to, Dookh-Doctor,” he said. “It is the happy oneness that is greater than self.”

“Oh I know that, but you put it on a little too thick. I’ve been taught it from my babyhood. I’m resigned to it.”

“Resigned to it? You should be ecstatic over it! The self must perish, of course, but it will live on as an integral atom of the evolving oneness, just

as a drop lives on in the ocean.”

“Aye, Migma, but the drop may hang onto the memory of the time when it was cloud, of the time when it was falling drop indeed, of the time when it was falling drop indeed, of the time when it was brook. It may say ‘There’s too damned much salt in this ocean. I’m lost here.’”

“Oh, but the drop will want to be lost, Dookh-Doctor. The only purpose of existence is to cease to exist. And there cannot be too much of salt in the evolving oneness. There cannot be too much of anything. All must be one in it. Salt and sulphur must be one, undifferentiated. Offal and soul must become one. Blessed be oblivion in the oneness that collapses on itself.”

“Stuff it, lay priest. I’m weary of it.”

“Stuff it, you say? I don’t understand your phrase, but I’m sure it’s apt. Yes, yes, Dookh-Doctor, stuff it all in: animals, people, rocks, grass, worlds and wasps. Stuff it all in. That all may be obliterated into the great — may I not coin a word even as the master coined them? — into the great stuffiness!”

“I’m afraid your word is all too apt.”

“It is the great quintessence, it is the happy death of all individuality and memory, it is the synthesis of all living and dead things into the great amorphism. It is the —”

“It is the old old salve, and it’s lost its twinkle,” the Dookh-Doctor said sadly. “How goes the old quotation? When the salve becomes sticky, how then will you come unstuck?”

No, the Dookh-Doctor did not have the right attitude, so it was necessary that many persons should harass him into it. Time was short. His death was due. And there was the general fear that the Dookh-Doctor might not be properly lost.

He surely came to his time of happiness in grumpy fashion.

The week was gone by. The last evening for him was come. The Dookh-Doctor ritually set his clinic on fire, and a few minutes later his house.

He burned, he scattered, he recited the special last-time recital. He ate holy inuin and holy ull. He took one glob of most bitter ash on his tongue: and he lay down to sleep his last night under the speir-sky.

He wasn’t afraid to die.

“I will cross that bridge gladly, but I want there to be another side to



that bridge,” he talked to himself. “And if there is no other side of it, I want it to be me who knows that there is not. They say ‘Pray that you be happily lost forever. Pray for blessed obliteration.’ I will not pray that I be happily lost forever. I would rather burn in a hell forever than suffer happy obliteration! I’ll burn if it be the that burn. I want me to be me. I will refuse forever to surrender myself.”

It was a restless night for him. Well, perhaps he could die easier if he were wearied and sleepless at dawn.

“Other men don’t make such a fuss about it,” he told himself (the self he refused to give up). “Other men are truly happy in obliteration. Why am I suddenly different? Other men desire to be lost, lost, lost. How have I lost the faith of my childhood and manhood? What is unique about me?”

There was no answer to that.

“Whatever is unique about me, I refuse to give it up. I will howl and moan against that extinction for billions of centuries. Ah, I will go sly! I will devise a sign so I will know me if I meet me again.”

About an hour before dawn the Lay Priest Migma, P.T. de C., came to Dookh-Doctor Drague. The dolcus and the arktos had reported that the man was resting badly and was not properly disposed.

“I have an analogy that may case your mind, Dookh-Doctor,” the Lay Priest whispered softly, “— ease it into great easiness, salve it into great salving —”

“Begone, fellow, your salve has lost its twinkle.”

“Consider that we have never lived, that we have only seemed to live. Consider that we do not die, but are only absorbed into great selfless self. Consider the odd sphairikoi of this world —”

“What about the sphairikoi? I consider them often.”

“I believe that they are set here for our instruction. A sphairikos is a total globe, the type of the great oneness. Then consider that it sometimes ruffles its surface, extrudes a little false-foot from its soft surface. Would it not be odd if that false-foot, for its brief second, considered itself a person? Would you not laugh at that?”

“No, no. I do not laugh.” And the Dookli-Doctor was on his feet.

“And in much less than a second, that pseudopod is withdrawn back into the sphere of the sphairikoi. So it is with our lives. Nothing dies. It is only a ripple on the surface of the oneness. Can you entertain so droll and

idea as that the pseudopod should remember, or wish to remember?”

“Yes. I’ll remember it a billion years for the billion who forget.”

The Dookh-Doctor was running uphill in the dark. He crashed into trees and boles as though he wished to remember the crashing forever.

“I’ll burn before I forget, but I must have something that says it’s me who burns!”

Up, up by the spherical hills of the sphairikoi, bawling and stumbling in the dark. Up to a hut that had a certain fame he could never place, to the hut that had its own identity, that sparkled with identity.

“Open, open, help me!” the Dookh-Doctor cried out at the last hut on the bill.

“Go away, man!” the last voice protested. “All my clients are gone, and the night is almost over with. What has this person to do with a human man anyhow?”

It was a round twinkling voice out of the roweled dark. But there was enduring identity there. The twinkling, enduring-identity colors, coining from the chinks of the hut, had not reached the level of vision. There was even the flicker of the I-will-know-me-if-I-meet-me-again color.

“Torchy Twelve, help me. I am told that you have the special salve that solves the last problem, and makes it know that it is always itself that is solved.”

“Why, it is the Dookh-Doc! Why have you come to Torchy?”

“I want something to send me into kind and everlasting slumber,” he moaned. “But I want it to be me who slumbers Cannot you help me in any way?”

“Come you in, the Dookh-Doc. This person, though promiscuous, is expert. I help you —”

## ALL PIECES OF A RIVER SHORE

It had been a very long and ragged and incredibly interlocked and detailed river shore. Then a funny thing happened. It had been broken up, sliced up into pieces. Some of the pieces had been folded and compressed into bales. Some of them had been cut into still smaller pieces and used for ornaments and as Indian medicine. Rolled and baled pieces of the shore came to rest in barns and old warehouses, in attics, in caves. Some were buried in the ground.

And yet the river itself still exists physically, as do its shores, and you may go and examine them. But the shore you will see along the river now is not quite the same as that old shore that was broken up and baled into bales and rolled onto rollers, not quite the same as the pieces you will find in attics and caves.

His name was Leo Nation and he was known as a rich Indian. But such wealth as he had now was in his collections, for he was an examining and acquiring man. He had cattle, he had wheat, he had a little oil, and he spent everything that came in. Had he more income he would have collected even more.

He collected old pistols, old ball shot, grindstones, early windmills, walking-horse threshing machines, flax combs, Conestoga wagons, brass-bound barrels, buffalo robes, Mexican saddles, slick horn saddles, anvils, Argand lamps, rush holders, hay-burning stoves, hackamores, branding irons, chuck wagons, longhorn horns, beaded scrapes, Mexican and Indian leatherwork, buckskins, heads, feathers, squirrel-tail anklets, arrowheads, deerskin shirts, locomotives, streetcars, millwheels, keelboats, buggies, ox yokes, old parlor organs, blood-and-thunder novels, old circus posters, harness bells, Mexican oxcarts, wooden cigar-store Indians, cable-twist tobacco a hundred years old and mighty strong, cuspidors (four hundred of them), Ferris wheels, carnival wagons, carnival props of various sorts, carnival proclamations painted big on canvas. Now he was going to collect something else. He was talking about it to one of his friends, Charles Longbank, who knew everything.

“Charley,” he said, “do you know anything about ‘The Longest Pictures in the World’ which used to be shown by carnivals and in hippodromes?”

“Yes, I know a little about them Leo. They are an interesting bit of Americana: a bit of nineteenth-century back country mania. They were

supposed to be pictures of the Mississippi River shore. They were advertised as one mile long, five miles long, nine miles long. One of them, I believe, was actually over a hundred yards long. They were badly painted on bad canvas, crude trees and mudbank and water ripples, simplistic figures and all as repetitious as wallpaper. A strong-armed man with a big brush and plenty of barn paint of three colors could have painted quite a few yards of such in one day. Yet they are truly Americana. Are you going to collect them, Leo?"

"Yes, but the real ones aren't like you say."

"Leo, I saw one. There is nothing to them but very large crude painting."

"I have twenty that are like you say, Charley. I have three that are very different. Here's an old carnival poster that mentions one."

Leo Nation talked eloquently with his hands while he also talked with his mouth, and now he spread out an old browned poster with loving hands:

"The Arkansas Traveler, World's Finest Carnival, Eight Wagons, Wheels, Beasts, Dancing Girls, Baffling Acts, Monsters, Games of Chance. And Featuring the World's Longest Picture, Four Miles of Exquisite Painting. This is from the Original Panorama; it is Not a Cheap-Jack Imitation."

"So you see, Charley, there was a distinction: there were the original pictures, and there were the crude imitations."

"Possibly some were done a little better than the others, Leo; they could hardly have been done worse. Certainly, collect them if you want to. You've collected lots of less interesting things."

"Charley, I have a section of that panoramic picture that once belonged to the Arkansas Traveler Carnival. I'll show it to you. Here's another poster:

"King Carnival, The King of Them All. Fourteen Wagons. Ten Thousand Wonders. See the Rubber Man. See the Fire Divers. See the Longest Picture in the World, see Elephants on the Mississippi River. This is a Genuine Shore Depictment, not the Botches that Others Show."

"You say that you have twenty of the ordinary pictures, Leo, and three that are different?"

"Yes, I have, Charley. I hope to get more of the genuine. I hope to get the whole river."

“Let’s go look it one, Leo, and see what the difference is.”

They went out to one of the hay barns. Leo Nation kept his collections in a row of hay barns. “What would I do?” he had asked once, “call im a carpenter and tell him to build me a museum? He’d say, ‘Leo, I can’t build a museum without plans and stuff. Get me some plans.’ And where would I get plans? So I always tell him to build me another hay barn one hundred feet by sixty feet and fifty feet high. Then I always put in four or five decks myself and floor them, and leave open vaults for the tall sttiff. Besides, I believe a hay barn won’t cost as much as a museum.”

“This will be a big field, Cliarley,” Leo Nation said now as they came to one of the hay-barn museums. “It will take all your science in every field to figure it out. Of the three genuine ones I have, each is about a hundred and eighty yards long. I believe this is about the standard length, though some may have been multiples of these. They passed for paintings in the years of their display, Charley, but they are not paintings.”

“What are they then, Leo?”

“I hire you to figure this out. You are the man who knows everything.”

Well, there were two barrel reels there, each the height of a man, and several more were set further back.

“The old turning mechanism is likely worth a lot more than the picture,” Charles Longbank told Leo Nation. “This was turned by mule on a treadmill, or by a mule taking a mill pole round and round. It might even be eighteenth century.”

“Yeah, but I use all electric motor on it.” Leo said, “The only mule I have left is a personal friend of mine. I’d no more make him turn that than he’d make me if I were the mule. I line it up like I think it was, Charley, the full reel north and the empty one south. Then we run it. So we travel, we scan, from south to north, going upstream as we face west.”

“It’s funny canvas and funny paint, much better than the one I saw,” said Charles Longbank, “and it doesn’t seem worn out by all the years.”

“It isn’t either one, canvas or paint,” said Ginger Nation, Leo’s wife, as she appeared from somewhere. “It is picture.”

Leo Nation started the reeling and ran it. It was the wooded bank of a river. It was a gravel and limestone bank with mud overlay and the mud undercut a little. And it was thick timber to the very edge of the shore.

“It is certainly well done,” Charles Longbank admitted. “From the one I saw and from what I read about these, I wasn’t prepared for this.” The

rolling picture was certainly not repetitious, but one had the feeling that the riverbank itself might have been a little so, to lesser eyes than those of the picture.

“It is virgin forest, mostly deciduous,” said Charles Longbank, “and I do not believe that there is any such temperate forest on any large river in the world today. It would have been logged out. I do not believe that there were many such stretches even in the nineteenth century. Yet I have a feeling that it is a faithful copy of something, and not imaginary.”

The rolling shores: cottonwood trees, slash pine, sycamore, slippery elm, hackberry, pine again.

“When I get very many of the pictures, Charley, you will put them on film and analyze them or have some kind of computer do it. You will be able to tell from the sun’s angle what order the pictures should have been in, and how big are the gaps in between.”

“No, Leo, they would all have to reflect the same hour of the same day to do that.”

“But it was all the same hour of the same day,” Ginger Nation cut in. “How could you take one picture at two hours of two days?”

“She’s right, Charley,” Leo Nation said. “All the pictures of the genuine sort are pieces of one original authentic picture. I’ve known that all along.”

Rolling shore of pine, laurel oak, butternut, persimmon, pine again.

“It is a striking reproduction, whatever it is,” Charles Longbank said, “but I’m afraid that after a while even this would become as monotonous as repeating wallpaper.”

“Hah,” said Leo. “For a smart man you have dumb eyes, Charley. Every tree is different, every leaf is different. All the trees are in young leaf too. It’s about a last-week-of-March picture. What it hangs on, though, is what part of the river it is. It might be a third-week-in-March picture, or a first-week-in-April. The birds, old Charley who know everything, why don’t we pick up more birds in this section? And what birds are those there?”

“Passenger pigeons, Leo, and they’ve been gone for quite a few decades. Why don’t we see more birds there? I’ve a humorous answer to that, but it implies that this thing is early and authentic. We don’t see more birds because they are too well camouflaged. North America is today a bird watchers’ paradise because very many of its bright birds are

later European intrusions that have replaced native varieties. They have not yet adjusted to the native backgrounds, so they stand out against them visually. Really, Leo, that is a fact. A bird can't adapt in a short four or five hundred years. And there are birds, birds, birds in that, Leo, if you look sharp enough."

"I look sharp to begin with, Charley; I just wanted you to look sharp."

"This rolling ribbon of canvas or whatever is about six feet high, Leo, and I believe the scale is about one to ten, going by the height of mature trees and other things."

"Yeah, I think so, Charley. I believe there's about a mile of river shore in each of my good pictures. There's things about these pictures though, Charley, that I'm almost afraid to tell you. I've never been quite sure of your nerves. But you'll see them for yourself when you come to examine the pictures closely."

"Tell me those things now, Leo, so I'll know what to look for."

"It's all there, Charley, every leaf, every knob of bark, every spread of moss. I've put parts of it under a microscope, ten power, fifty power, four hundred power. There's detail that you couldn't see with your bare eyes if you had your nose right in the middle of it. You can even see cells of leaf and moss. You put a regular painting under that magnification and all you see is details of pigment, and canyons and mountains of brush strokes. Charley, you can't find a brush stroke in that whole picture! Not in any of the real ones."

It was rather pleasant to travel up that river at the leisurely equivalent rate of maybe four miles an hour. Actually the picture rolled past them at about half a mile an hour. Rolling bank and rolling trees, pin oak, American elm, pine, black willow, staining willow.

"How come there is shining willow, Charley, and no white willow, you tell me that?" Leo asked.

"If this is the Mississippi, Leo, and if it is authentic, then this must be a far northern sector of it."

"Naw. It's Arkansas, Charley. I can tell Arkansas anywhere. How come there was shining willow in Arkansas?"

"If that is Arkansas, and if the picture is authentic, it was colder then."

"The white willow is a European introduction, though a very early one, and it spread rapidly. There are things in this picture that check too well.

The three good pictures that you have, they are pretty much alike?”

“Yeah, but they are not quite the same stretch of river. The sun’s angle is a little different in each of them, and the sod and the low plants are a little different.”

“You think you will be able to get more of the pictures?”

“Yeah, I think more than a thousand miles of river was in the picture. I think I get more than a thousand sections if I know where to look.”

“Probably most have been destroyed long ago, Leo, if there were ever more than the dozen or so that were advertised by the carnivals. And probably there were duplications in that dozen or so. Carnivals changed their features often, and your three pictures may be all that there ever were. Each could have been exhibited by several carnivals and in several hippodromes at different times.”

“Nah, there were more, Charicy. I don’t have the one with the elephants in it yet. I think there are more than a thousand of them somewhere. I advertise for them (for originals, not the cheap-jack imitations), and I will begin to get answers.”

“How many there were, there still are,” said Ginger Nation. “They will not destroy. One of ours has the reel burned by fire, but the picture did not burn. And they won’t burn.”

“You might spend a lot of money on a lot of old canvas, Leo,” said Charles Longbank. “But I will analyze them for you: now, or when you think you have enough of them for it.”

“Wait till I get more, Charley,” said Leo Nation. “I will make a clever advertisement. ‘I take those things of your hands,’ I will say, and I believe that people will be glad to get rid of the old things that won’t burn and won’t destroy, and weigh a ton each with reels. It’s the real ones that won’t destroy. Look at that big catfish just under the surface there, Charley! Look at the mean eyes of that catfish! The river wasn’t as muddy them even if was springtime and the water was high.”

Rolling shore and trees: pine, dogwood, red cedar, bur oak, pecan, pine again, shagbark hickory. Then the rolling picture came to an end.

“A little over twenty minutes I timed it,” said Charles Longbank. “Yes, a yokel of the past century might have believed that the picture was a mile long, or even five or nine miles long.”

“Nah,” said Leo. “They were smarter then, Charley; they were smarter then. Most likely that yokel would have believed that it was a little less



than a furlong long, as it is. He'd have liked it, though. And there may be pieces that are five miles long or nine miles long. Why else would they have advertised them? I think I can hit the road and smell out where a lot of those pictures are. And I will call in sometimes and Ginger can tell me who have answered the advertisements. Come here again in six months, Charley, and I will have enough sections of the river for you to analyze. You won't get lonesome in six months, will you, Ginger?"

"No. There will be the hay cutters, and the men from the cattle auctions, and the oil gaugers, and Charley Longbank here when he comes out, and the men in town and the men in the Hill-Top Tavern. I won't get lonesome."

"She jokes, Charley," said Leo. "She doesn't really fool around with the fellows."

"I do not joke," said Ginger. "Stay gone seven months, I don't care."

Leo Nation did a lot of traveling for about five months. He acquired fifty genuine sections of the river and he spent quite a few thousands of dollars on them. He went a couple of years into hock for them. It would have been much worse had not many people given him the things and many others had sold them to him for very small amounts. But there were certain stubborn men and women who insisted on a good price. This is always the hazard of collecting, the thing that takes most of the fun out of it. All these expensively acquired sections were really prime pieces and Leo could not let himself pass them by.

How he had located so many pieces is his own mystery, but Leo Nation did really have a nose for these things. He smell them out; and all collectors of all things must have such long noses.

There was a professor man in Rolla, Missouri, who had rugged his whole house with pieces of a genuine section.

"That sure is tough stuff, Nation," the man said. "I've been using it for rugs for forty years and it isn't worn at all. See how fresh the trees still are! I had to cut it up with a chain saw, and I tell you that it's tougher than ally wood in the world for all that it's nice and flexible."

"How much for all the rugs, for all the pieces of pieces that you have?" Leo asked uneasily. There seemed something wrong with using the pieces for rugs, and yet this didn't seem like a wrong man.

"Oh, I won't sell you any of my rugs, but I will give you pieces of it, since you're interested, and I'll give you the big piece I have left. I never

could get anyone much interested in it. We analyzed the material out at the college. It is a very sophisticated plastic material. We could reproduce it, or something very like it, but it would be impossibly expensive, and plastics two-thirds as tough are quite cheap. The funny thing, though, I can trace the history of the thing back to quite a few decades before any plastic was first manufactured in the world. There is a big puzzle there, for some man with enough curiosity to latch onto it.” “I have enough curiosity; I have already latched onto it,” Leo Nation said. “That piece you have on the wall — it looks like — if only I could see it under magnification —”

“Certainly, certainly, Nation. It looks like a swarm of bees there, and it is. I’ve a slide prepared from a fringe of it. Come and study it. I’ve shown it to lots of intelligent people and they all say ‘So what?’ It’s all attitude that I can’t understand.”

Leo Nation studied the magnification with delight. “Yeah,” he said. “I can even see the hairs on the bees’ legs. In one flaking-off piece there I can even make out the cells of a hair.” He fiddled with low and high magnifications for a long while. “But the bees sure are funny ones,” he said. “My father told me about bees like that once and I thought he lied.”

“Our present honeybees are of late European origin, Nation,” the man said. “The native American bees were funny and inefficient from a human viewpoint. They are not quite extinct even yet, though. There are older-seeming creatures in some of the scenes.”

“What are the clown animals in the piece on your kitchen floor?” Leo asked. “Say, those clowns are big!”

“Ground Sloths, Nation. They set things as pretty old. If they are a hoax, they are the grandest hoax I ever ran into. A man would have to have a pretty good imagination to give a peculiar hair form to all extinct animal — a flair form that living sloths in the tropics just do riot have. But how many lifetimes would it have taken to paint even a square foot of this in such microscopic detail? There is no letdown anywhere, Nation; there is prodigious detail in every square centimeter of it.”

“Why are the horses so small and the buffaloes so big?”

“I don’t know, Nation. It would take a man with a hundred sciences to figure it out, unless a man with a hundred sciences had hoaxed it. And where was such a man two hundred and fifty years ago?”

“You trace your piece that far back?”

“Yes. And the scene itself might well be fifteen thousand years old. I tell you that this is a mystery. Yes, You can carry those scraps with you if you wish, and I’ll have the bale that’s the remaining big piece freighted up to your place.”

There was a man in Arkansas who had a section of the picture stored in a cave. It was a tourist-attraction cave, but the river shore picture had proved a sour attraction.

“The people all think it is some sort of movie projection I have set up here in my cave here,” he said. “‘Who wants to come down in a cave to see movies,’ they say. ‘If we want to see a river shore we will go see a river shore,’ they say, ‘we won’t come down in a cave to see it.’ Well, I thought it would be a good attraction, but it wasn’t.”

“How did you get it in here, man?” Leo Nation asked him. “That passage just isn’t big enough to bring it in.”

“Oh, it was already here, rock rollers and all, fifteen years ago when I broke out that little section to crawl through.”

“Then it had to be here a very long time. That wall has formed since.”

“Nah, not very long,” the mail said. “These limestone curtains form fast, what with all the moisture trickling down here. The thing could have been brought in here is recent as five hundred years ago. Sure, I’ll sell it. I’ll even break out a section so we can get it out. I have to make the passage big enough to walk in anyhow. Tourists don’t like to crawl on their bellies in caves. I don’t know why. I always liked to crawl on my belly in caves.”

This was one of the most expensive sections of the picture that Nation bought. It would have been even more expensive if he had shown any interest in certain things seen through trees in one sequence of the picture. Leo’s heart had come up into his mouth when he had noticed those things, and he’d had to swallow it again and maintain his wooden look. This was a section that had elephants on the Mississippi River.

The elephant (*Mammuth americanum*) was really a mastodon, Leo had learned that much from Charles Longbank. Ah, but now he owned the elephants; now he had one of the key pieces of the puzzle.

You find a lot of them in Mexico. Everything drifts down to Mexico when it gets a little age on it. Leo Nation was talking with a rich Mexican man who was as Indian as himself.

“No, I don’t know where the Long Picture first came from,” the man

said, “but it did come from the North, somewhere in the region of the River itself. In the time of De Soto (a little less than five hundred years ago) there was still Indian legend of the Long Picture, which he didn’t understand. Yourselves of the North, of course, are like children. Even the remembering tribes of you like the Caddos have memories no longer than five hundred years.

“We ourselves remember much longer than that. But as to this, all that we remember is that each great family of its took a section of the Long Picture along when we came to Mexico. That was, perhaps, eight hundred years ago that we came south as conquerors. These pictures are now like treasures to the old great Indian families, like hidden treasures, memories of one of our former homes. Others of the old families will not talk to you about them. They will even deny that they have them. I talk to you about it, I show it to you, I even give it to you because I am a dissident, a sour man, not like the others.”

“The early Indian legcilds, Don Caetano, did they say where the Long Picture came from or who painted it?”

“Sure. They say it was painted by a very peculiar great being, and his name (hold onto your capelo) was Great River Shore Picture Painter. I’m sure that will help you. About the false or cheap-jack imitations for which you seem to have contempt, don’t. They are not what they seem to you, and they were not done for money. These cheap-jack imitations are of Mexican origin, just as the staining originals were born in the states. They were done for the new great families in their aping of the old great families, in the hope of also sharing in ancient treasure and ancient luck. Having myself just left off aping great families of another sort, I have a bitter understanding of these imitations. Unfortunately, they were done in an age that lacked art, but the contrast would have been as great in any case: all art would seem insufficient beside that of the Great River Shore Picture Painter himself.

“The cheap-jack imitation pictures were looted by gringo soldiers of the U.S. Army during the Mexican War, as they seemed to be valued by certain Mexican families. From the looters they found their way to mid-century cariiivals in the States.”

“Don Caetano, do you know that the picture segments stand up under great magnification, that there are details in them far too fine to be seen by the unaided eye?”

“I am glad you say so. I have always had this on faith but I’ve never had enough faith to put it to the test. Yes, we have always believed the pictures contained depths within depths.”

“Why are there Mexican wild pigs in this view, Don Caetano? It’s as though this one had a peculiar Mexican slant to it.”

“No, the peccary was an all-American pig, Leo. It went all the way north to the ice. But it’s been replaced by the European pig everywhere but in our own wilds. You want the picture? I will have my man load it and ship it to your place. “

“Ah, I would give you something for it surely —”

“No, Leo, I give it freely. You are a man that I like. Receive it, and God be with you! Ah, Leo, in parting, and since you collect strange things, I have here a box of bright things I think you might like. I believe they are no more than worthless garnets, but are they not pretty?”

Garnets? They were not garnets. Worthless? Then why did Leo Nation’s eyes dazzle and his heart come up in his throat? With trembling hands he turned the stones over and worshipped. And when Don Caetano gave them to him for the token price of one thousand dollars, his heart rejoiced.

You know what? They really were worthless garnets. But what had Leo Nation thought that they were in that fateful moment? What spell had Don Caetano put on him to make him think they were something else?

Oh well, you win here and you lose there. And Don Caetano really did ship the treasured picture to him free.

Leo Nation came home after five months of wandering and collecting.

“I stand it without you for five months,” Ginger said. “I could not have stood it for six months, I sure could not have stood it for seven. I kidded. I didn’t really fool around with the fellows. I had the carpenter build another hay barn to hold the pieces of picture you sent in. There were more than fifty of them.”

Leo Nation had his friend Charles Longbank come out.

“Fifty seven new ones, Charley,” Leo said. “That makes sixty with what I had before. Sixty miles of river shore I have now, I think. Analyze them, Charley. Get the data out of them somehow and feed it to your computers. First I want to know what order they go in, south to north, and how big the gaps between them are.”

“Leo, I tried to explain before, that would require (besides the

presumption of authenticity) that they were all done at the same hour of the same day.”

“Presume it all, Charley. They were all done at the same time, or we will assume that they were. We will work on that presumption.”

“Leo, ah — I had hoped that you would fail in your collecting. I still believe we should drop it all.”

“Me, I hoped we would succeed, Charley, and I hoped harder. Why are you afraid of spooks? Me, I meet them every hour of my life. That’s what keeps the air fresh.”

“I’m afraid of it, Leo. All right, I’ll get some equipment out here tomorrow, but I’m afraid of it. Damn it, Leo, who was here?”

“Wasn’t anybody here,” Ginger said. “I tell you like I tell Charley, I was only kidding, I don’t really fool around with fellows.”

Charles Longbank got some equipment out there the next day. Charles himself was looking bad, maybe whiskeyed up a little bit, jerky, and looking over his shoulder all the time as though he had an owl perched on the back of his neck. But he did work several days running the picture segments and got them all down on scan film. Then he would program his computer and feed the data from the scan films to it.

“There’s a shadow, like a thin cloud on several of the pictures,” Leo Nation said. “You any idea what it is, Charley?”

“Leo, I got out of bed late last night and ran two miles up and down that rocky back road of yours to shake myself up. I was afraid I was getting an idea of what those thin clouds were. Lord, Leo, who was here?”

Charles Longbank took the data into town and fed it to his computers.

He was back in several days with the answers.

“Leo, this spooks me more than ever,” he said, and he looked as if the spooks had chewed him from end to end. “Let’s drop the whole thing. I’ll even give you back your retainer fee.”

“No, man, no. You took the retainer fee and you are retained. Have you the order they go in, Charley, south to north?”

“Yes, here it is. But don’t do it, Leo, don’t do it.”

“Charley, I only shuffle them around with my lift fork and put them in order. I’ll have it done in an hour.”

And in an hour he had it done.

“Now, let’s look at the south one first, and then the north one, Charley.”

“No, Leo, no, no! Don’t do it.”

“Why not?”

“Because it scares me. They really do fall into an order. They really could have been done all at the same hour of the same day. Who was here, Leo? Who is the giant looking over my shoulder?”

“Yeah, he’s a big one, isn’t he, Charley? But he was a good artist and artists have the right to be a little peculiar. He looks over my shoulder a lot too.”

Leo Nation ran the southernmost segment of the Long Picture. It was mixed land and water, islands, bayou and swamp, estuary and ocean mixed with muddy river.

“It’s pretty, but it isn’t the Mississippi,” said Leo as it ran. “It’s that other river down there. I’d know it after all these years too.”

“Yes,” Charles Longbank gulped. “It’s the Atchafalaya River. By the comparative sun angle of the pieces that had been closely identified, the computer was able to give close bearings on all the segments. This is the mouth of the Atchafalaya River which has several times in the geological past been the main mouth of the Mississippi. But how did he know if he wasn’t here? Gah, the ogre is looking over my shoulder again. It scares me, Leo.”

“Yeah, Charley, I say a man ought to be really scared at least once a day so he can sleep that night. Me, I’m scared for at least a week now, and I like the big guy. Well, that’s one end of it, or mighty close to it. Now we take the north end.

“Yes, Charley, yes. The only thing that scares you is that they’re real. I don’t know why he has to look over our shoulders when we run them, though. If he’s who I think he is he’s already seen it all.”

Leo Nation began to run the northernmost segment of the river that he had.

“How far north are we in this, Charley?” he asked.

“Along about where the Cedar River and the Iowa River later came in.”

“That all the farther north? Then I don’t have any segment of the north third of the river?”

“Yes, this is the furthest north it went, Leo. Oh god, this is the last

one.”

“A cloud on this segment too, Charley? What are they anyhow? Say, this is a pretty crisp scene for springtime on the Mississippi.”

“You look sick, Long-Charley-Bank,” Ginger Nation said. “You think a little whiskey with possum’s blood would help you?”

“Could I have the one without the other? Oh, yes, both together, that may be what I need. Hurry, Ginger.”

“It bedevils me still how any painting could be so wonderful,” Leo wondered.

“Haven’t you caught on yet, Leo?” Charles shivered. “It isn’t a painting.”

“I tell you that at the beginning if you only listen to me,” Ginger Nation said. “I tell you it isn’t either one, canvas or paint, it is only picture. And Leo said the same thing once, but then he forgets. Drink this, old Charley.”

Charles Longbank drank the healing mixture of good whiskey and possum’s blood, and the northernmost section of the river rolled on.

“Another cloud on the picture, Charley,” Leo said. “It’s like a big smudge in the air between us and the shore.”

“Yes, and there will be another,” Charles moaned. “It means we’re getting near the end. Who were they, Leo? How long ago was it? Ah — I’m afraid I know that part pretty close — but they couldn’t have been human then, could they? Leo, if this was just an inferior throwaway, why are they still hanging in the air?”

“Easy, old Charley, easy. Man, that river gets chalky and foamy! Charley, couldn’t you transfer all this to microfilm and feed it into your computers for all sorts of answers?”

“Oh, God, Leo, it already is!”

“Already is what? Hey what’s the fog, what’s the mist? What is it that bulks up behind the mist? Man, what kind of blue fog-mountain —?”

“The glacier, you dummy, the glacier,” Charles Longbank groaned. And the northernmost segment of the river came to all end.

“Mix up a little more of that good whiskey and possum’s blood, Ginger,” Leo Nation said. “I think we’re all going to need it.”

“That old, is it?” Leo asked a little later as they were all strangling on the very strong stuff.

“Yes, that old, “ Charles Longbank jittered. “Oh, who was here, Leo?”



“And, Charley, it already is what?”

“It already is microfilm, Leo, to them. A rejected strip, I believe.”

“Ah, I can understand why whiskey and possum’s blood never caught on as a drink,” Leon said. “Was old possum here then?”

“Old possum was, we weren’t.” Charles Longbank shivered. “But it seems to me that something older than possum is snuffing around again, and with a bigger snuffer.”

Charles Longbank was shaking badly. One more thing and he would crack. “The clouds on the — ah — film, Charley, what are they?” Leo Nation asked.

And Charles Longbank cracked.

“God over my head,” he moaned out of a shivering face, “I wish they were clouds on the film. Ah, Leo, Leo, who were they, who were they?”

“I’m cold, Charley,” said Leo Nation. “There’s bonechill draft from somewhere.”

The marks... too exactly like something, and too big to be: the loops and whorls that were eighteen feet long....

## FROG ON THE MOUNTAIN

He woke to mountains, as the poet says. Really, there is nothing like it. The oceans and the lowlands were made long ago, according to legend. But the mountains are made new every morning.

It took some doing. His name was Garamask, and he had done it.

“I hate space,” Garamask had said when he decided on it, and the crewmen had been surprised.

“Why do you, Mr. Garamask?” the Captain had asked him. “You’ve logged more time in space than I have. You’ve been to many more regions. And you’ve made more money in the space business than anyone I know. I never saw a man so eager for voyages or for new worlds as you. You’re so expansive a person that I thought you were in love with the expanse of space.

“I love movement and travel,” Garamask said. “I love worlds! But in space, the feel of movement and the sense of travel is quickly lost And space is not expansive. It is shriveling.

“I have, let us say, a passion for a certain unkempt and mountainous world, but space comes near to destroying that passion in me; for I have seen that world appear on the scope like a microbe, and I will watch it disappear like a microbe again. I have studied epic and towering things under the microscope. And when I put away the microscope, I know that the towering things are really too small to see. From the aspect of space, all the towering and wild worlds that I love are things too small to see or to believe in. I love a big world, and I hate space for spoiling that bigness.”

“Paravata isn’t so big a world, Mr. Garamask,” the Captain told him.

“It is! It’s big! It’s huge!” Garamask insisted. “And I’ll not have it spoiled. It is the largest possible world on the man-scale, and I will not let that scale suffer by comparison. It’s a world as large as a man can get around on with ease, without becoming less than a man. It’s half again Earth’s gravity, so it calls out our strength. It has an atmosphere that keeps one on an oxygen binge, so it gives the strength something to draw on. It has mountains that rise ten thousand meters, the highest mountains anywhere that a man can climb in his proper body and without apparatus.

“And I won’t have it spoiled for me! I’m rich enough that you can’t

regard me as a nuisance. I've given my instructions. So, follow them as regards me."

"Mr. Garamask, weren't you ever young?" the Captain asked him.

"I am young yet, Captain. I am physically the fittest man on this ship. And this is a very young and aspiring idea that I am effecting now."

"Ah, were you never something else, Mr Garamask, not quite so young, and much more awkward?"

"I don't know what you mean, Captain, but I suspect that I never was. Follow my instructions."

The instructions of Garamask were that he be sent into a sustaining sleep, and that he be landed and lodged on Paravata of the Mountains while he slept. He did not know when Paravata was picked up microbe-sized nor when it grew a hundred million times to the size of a pea. He did not see the planet grow to twice the size of Earth. He missed the landing.

He was taken from the ship at Paravata Landing and transported a hundred kilometers to the mountain lodge. He was installed there as befitted a man of means. He slept a determined number of hours, as he had planned it, and he woke in the very early morning. He woke to mountains.

He went out into the keen air of Paravata or Paravath, finding himself in the middle of the small town of Mountain-Foot. He had a warrant for arrest and death in his wallet; and he had a singing curiosity about this world whose vital civilization had suddenly been frozen in motion, whose people, the Rogha (the elites, the excellent ones), had disappeared or very nearly disappeared and whose place had been taken by the oafish Oganta, and this almost within living memory. He was on a hunting trip in depth: he would hunt: on the three stage mountain to kill Sinek the cat-lion; Riksino the bear, Shasos the eagle-condor, and Bater-Jeno the crag-ape or the frog-man (depending on the translation). This was said to be the most challenging hunt in the galaxy. And most likely he would die on the triple mountain, for no human hunter had ever bagged all four of the creatures and survived the thing; though Oganta hunters were said to have done the trick.

On the second level, Gararnask was hunting for the answer to the riddle: what had happened to the Rogha elites? Could those few who were left not be strengthened in their hold? Could their civilization not be

unfrozen? Might it not be discovered what queer hold the oafish Oganta had over this Hogha remnant? How had the excellent ones fallen (willingly, it was said) to their inferiors?

On the third level, Garamask was hunting for a murderer, the Oganta, Rogha, Animal, or Man who had killed Allyn. Allyn had been a close friend, but Garamask had not realized how close until after the event. It had been given out that Allyn, on the same hunt, had been killed by the Bater-Jeno, the crag-ape or the frog-man. Allyn, however, had newly appeared to Garamask in a rhapsody-dream and said that this was not so. He had been killed, said Allyn, by his guide and hunting companion, who had been an Oganta named Ocras, but who might not now be in Oganta form.

“I believe that we have been close,” Allyn had said, “though we never spoke of our closeness. Avenge me, Garamask, and take the lid off the mystery of Paravath. I was so very close to uncovering the mystery myself.” “What had you found, Allyn?” Garamask had asked; but appearances in dreams often seem hard of hearing; they speak but they do not listen.

“Uncover it, Garamask,” Allyn had repeated, “and avenge me. I was so close to it. He ate into the base of my skull and so killed me. He ate my very brains as I died.” “But what did you find when you came so close, Allyn?” Garamask had asked once more. “Tell me what you had going, so I will know what to look for.” “I was so close to it when I died,” Allyn said.

Apparitions are as stone-deaf. They speak their message but they do not hear. You may have noticed this yourself.

Garamask was not a great believer in dreams, but he had desired this hunt for a long time; he had, in fact, intended to accompany Allyn on his hunt, but had been prevented by affairs. And he had known at the time of the dream, had not known till he had gone carefully over the report, that Allyn had indeed been killed by having his skull eaten into. Now Garamask tested it a little.

“My guide, will he be Ocras?” he asked the gangling Oganta who was manager of the hunting lodge.

“Ocras? No, he is no longer a guide. He has been translated out of this life.”

“But there was a guide named Ocras?”

“There was one time a guide named Ocras, who is no more. Your

guide will be Chavo.”

But there had been a guide named Ocras, and Garamask hadn't known the name except in the rhapsody-dream. Then Garaniask saw one of the Rogha survivors walking proudly in the early keen air. He went to him at once meeting him on a rocky slope.

“I have an intense interest in you and all your kind,”

Garamask began. “You yourself are the face of the mystery. You are imposing in a way that I could never be; I can see why you are called the elite, the excellent ones. You are so startlingly in contrast to the Oganta here that everyone for worlds around is puzzled over it. You are kings. They are oafs. Why do they take you over?”

“I suppose it is the day of the oafs, pilgrim-man,” the Hogha said easily. “I am Treorai, and you are the man Garamask who made preparations to wake to mountains. You have taken up the challenge of the three-stage mountain. It's a high aspiration to kill the four creatures there. One who has done it will experience a deep change.

“As Allyn did?”

“I knew him when he was here. He did not kill the four creatures. He was killed by the fourth.”

“He has told me, outside the lines as it were, that he killed by something other.”

“Allyn would not lie, even outside the lines. You have misunderstood him. Did he say that he completed the hunt and killed the fourth creature?”

“He said that he had killed Sinek the lion, Riksino the bear, Shasos the eagle; but, no, he did not say that he had killed the Bater-Jeno. He said, however, that he was murdered by something else.”

“No, Garamask, he was killed by the fourth prey. A creature is often fuzzy in his mind about his own manner of dying. He was a wonderful fellow, though, for a man.”

“Treorai, why has your civilization come to a grotesque halt? Why have you Rogha, in your manifest superiority all but died out? Why have the rough rampant Oganta taken over? A dozen of them couldn't take one of you. You have the presence that would dumbfound any attack. I can feel it like magnetism. Is it a genetic thing that has happened?”

“A genetic thing, a ghostly thing, a sundering thing really, Garamask. But it isn't finished, and there is no apathy here. What we Rogha have

lost, we will regain, by any means whatsoever. This eclipse will pass from us.”

“Why don’t you simply annihilate the Oganta, Treorai?”

“You are an educated man, Garamask, but your speaking of the Paravath language is imperfect. I simply do not understand your question. I have some World-English, if that would help.”

“Treorai, why do you Rogha not simply annihilate the Oganta?” Garamask asked the excellent Rogha in World-English.

“No, Garamask, I have not so much of the idiom as I thought,” said Treorai. “Your question is simply incomprehensible in whatever language it is put. Ah, your guide has peeped out to see if you are ready. Grab him quickly, or he will go in and be back to sleep again. The Oganta are not morning types. And the sun should not find you still at Mountain-Foot. It should find you at least two hundred meters aloft. See that ledge there! It is a wonderful place to catch first sun.”

“I see that it will be,” said Garamask. “And it will take some inspired climbing to get there in time. If I live I will see you again, excellent one.”

“High hunting, Garamask! A very strong hunter with a very good guide may kill the first three creatures. To kill the fourth, the hunter must transcend himself.”

Garamask started up the Mountain Domba (the first mountain of the three-mountain complex) with Chavo his booming Oganta guide. The Oganta are rangy and solid creatures, and strength and endurance is their birth-right. Say what you will about the loud oafs, they are strong climbers! And Garamask was a very strong man who had climbed on heavier-than-World worlds before. And ah, there is sometimes an advantage in knowing the Paravath language imperfectly. Garamask could tune Chavo out. It took all his attention to follow the language, and his attention was mercifully on many other things as they went up. And yet Chavo laughed and boomed incessantly, like boulders clashing together.

A queer and unfinished looking creature was this tuned out. The Oganta climbed, clawed and daggered and fanged and armored. That was the best way then. Garamask did likewise. He didn’t envy the Oganta his youth and towering strength. Garamask had his own strength and he enjoyed testing it. But he envied the Oganta, a little, his fangs. Garamask had no such giant canine teeth to support the giant saber-fangs. He had

no such bull-bowed neck, nor skull-massif, nor buttressed and ridged upper jaw to support such sabers. But he had donned a pretty good set of fangs himself and he believed he would know how to use them.

From one jagged turning, Garamask caught a dizzy view of Daingean City far away. The excellent Rogha had been builders at least equal to men. Now their cities were almost emptied of them, and the oafish Oganta lived in them like animals denning. Then the jagged turning became even more jagged, and Garamask could not afford another glance at the city.

They ate aran-moss and cobble-moss, and pods of tiger grass. They chewed green coill-nuts for water. They climbed high and hard. Then Garamask caught the whiff and the spoor of the spook animals, and he knew it out of the cellar of his mind.

“Ah, this is the world you live on,” he breathed, “and you are not imaginary at all. Animal who is no animal, I know what you are.” Garamask slavered when he called out because of the great fangs capped to his dog teeth. “The old Creeks called you the all-animal, and pictured you as made out of parts of many. And men said you were the Asian lion, or leopard, or tiger, or rock-lion, or American puma. And all the time you were yourself, the legend animal.”

“Who do you talk to, Papa Garamask?” Chavo asked in some alarm. “Do you talk to the grandfather of Sinek?”

“To the great-great-grandfather of Sinek, oaf. In the rain forests, they told poor men that your name was jaguar, but the poor men knew better. In the old South of the Conglomerate States on World, they told that your name was puma or cougar, but the poor cracker-men always knew your real species. Spook animal, I come after you!”

“Papa Garamask throw but a rock into the thicket and it will slink off. It is only one of the sineks, it is not Sinek himself. He seldom hunts so low or so early. And do not talk to the grandfather of Sinek, or he will come in your dreams and eat through your live throat and kill you.”

“Damn you, oaf, it is Sinek himself! He hunts low and early today. Grandfather of all the animals, I fight you now! Panther!”

And Garamask charged upward, across a slide of moss-covered rocks, into a tall thicket of tiger-grass and coill-bush, to fight panther, the animal who exists only in legend and misnomer. On Paravath he used the name Sinek.

It was a long black male. This was no sinek who would bound away, who would not stand. This was Sinek himself, and now Garamask understood why there could be only one of him at a time. The spook, the spirit filled this animal completely, with nothing left over for any other.

Garamask drew first blood, clawing the black panther half blind, getting his elbow dagger inside the panther's mouth, trying always to stay inside the animal's forepaws. Panther got one side of Garamask's head, above the throat armor, inside his mouth, failed to hold, slid bloodily along it, popped it out, and took an ear off neatly. The animal would weigh a hundred and fifty kilograms here, a hundred on Earth, just about Garamask's own weight. Panther, Sinek, knocked Garamask loose, and he slid on the loose rocks and moss, very nearly off the mountain to his death. Then they were in confrontation.

Sinek was upground of Garamask on the edge of the firm rock; and Garamask was on the loose-rock fringe that slipped and cascaded and was now flowing over the edge like water. Chavo, the Oganta oaf, was chewing a blade of tiger-grass and laughing.

It was with amazement that Garamask saw intelligence, almost total intelligence, in the eyes of Sinek the panther. This was a person and a personage, whatever the species. The intelligent look was almost friendly to Garamask, and the two understood each other. They would fight to the death, but they recognized each other for what they were, excellent ones, superior ones, Panther, Man, Rogha, firstlings, not to be compared to Oganta or Swine or Sloths.

Garamask made the attempt to break out of his sliding strip. He exchanged terrific clawing blows with Sinek, got the worse of it, and came much nearer to going off the mountain as he slid reeling back.

"Fear you nothing, Papa Garamask," the Oganta Chavo called from where he had scrambled higher. "I will roll boulders down on Sinek and kill him." And Chavo did roll boulders, badly, inaccurately, dangerously. Then Garamask understood from the oafish laughter that Chavo was trying to kill him and not Sinek; trying to knock the man off the mountain with the rolling boulders, or to induce a rockslide that would carry him irrevocably down.

With a mixture of stark terror and upsurging courage that was peculiar to himself in moments of deep crisis, Garamask battled up the sliding rocks, greatly impeded by his arms, and closed with Sinek the



panther again.

“I am as large, I am as strong, I am as armed, dammit, I am as animal!” Garamask gibbered. “We close together, good comrade. If I go off the mountain, you go off it too.”

But Garamask was wrong. The panther was more animal than he. It was doing him to death in the close fighting, though puzzled by the throat and crotch armor. “Who waits below to eat out my skull, Chavo?” Garamask howled out furiously. “who waits below to crack my skull and eat my brains? That is not Sinek here. It is scavengers below me, and a scavenger above me, you!”

“Papa Garamask,” Chavo chortled in a booming giggle from above, “fear you nothing. I will roll boulders down on Sinek and kill him.” And Chavo was rolling boulders down on them both, grappled together, to kill them both.

Garamask was losing, slipping. He broke off his capping fangs and his own canine teeth under them tried to slash through the sinews of panther; and he was choked on his own sudden blood. He raked the animal with elbow, knee, toe, and heel daggers, and was nearly disemboweled by a back foot of Sinek that equaled all the dagger functions. For the last time he broke free from the slashing, smashing panther and rolled in a stream of scree, trying to keep himself on the mountain.

Chavo set a large boulder at him to help him over the edge. Sinek the panther came lithely for the kill, and caught the boulder amidships as he flicked himself sly-footed along the edge of firm rock. And Sinek could not halt himself when he was knocked heavily into the sliding rock stream. Sinek the panther flowed off the mountain and fell into gaping space.

“Papa Garamask, I save your life,” Chavo the Oganta chortled from above. “Now I must make certain that Sinek is really dead where he has fallen so far below. I will roll yet more boulders down on him, and down on him till I am sure that he is dead.” And Chavo rolled boulders down at Garamask to knock him off the mountain; and the man scrambled in the sliding scree to avoid them. Three, six, nine boulders Chavo rolled down at Garamask, and then he had trouble in getting a fine boulder loose from its embedment. Garamask found a hidden spur of solid rock and went up quickly. Chavo turned, and they were on a level face to face: Garamask

bloody and crippled and earless, and full of muskiness and ghostliness, for part of the spook of Sinek, falling to death, had passed into Garamask. And Chavo, what can you say of the oaf Chavo of the species Oganta? Could he meet Garamask's eyes? No, but he never could have; all Oganta are wall-eyed. Did he blanch at the encounter? How can you tell with an Oganta? But the light blue bloom that was his complexion had lost a little of its sheen.

"Why do you pause, guide Chavo?" Garamask asked as a waiting volcano might ask. "We go up, we go up! We have not yet reached the top of the first mountain of Three-Mountain. We have killed only one of the four prey. We go up, we go up!"

They went up. They wore out the day with their climbing. They saw sineks and sineks who bounded away from them and would not stand. But they did not meet Sinek himself again that day. Sinek was dead for the while. Garamask took off his weapons and armor pieces and hooked them into his belt. Thereafter he climbed more easily. And just at last sun they came to the top of Domba Mountain, the first mountain of Three-Mountain.

It was a high plateau; it was another mountain-foot, for out of it rose the Mountain Giri, the second mountain of Three-Mountain. They ate bitter mountain rations and chewed green coill-nuts for water. They bedded down for the night, so Garamask thought.

But Chavo brought a stringed instrument from his pack and began some of the twangingest and most nauseating noise ever heard. He mixed his bumptious; booming voice with it in a curdling cry, and Garamask; understood that he would not be able to sleep with this.

"You have convinced me, pup," he growled. "You have established one of the universal ultimates — the most raucous noise ever. But is it necessary that you belabor the point?"

"You do not like it?" Chavo was surprised. "I pride myself on my music and my singing. We consider such to be dynamic perfection and cosmic looseness of sound..

"I consider it something else. The Rogha are said to be the most musical creatures in the universes. How could their co-dwellers here, you Oganta, be the least?"

"I had hoped you would like my music," Chavo sorrowed. "I still hope that you will like me. Reaily, we are likable creatures. Even some of the

Rogha have said so, with a certain exasperation, it is true.”

“You are crude unlicked calves, Chavo, and I understand your world less and less. Why, and how, are you killing the Rogha? For I believe that to be the case.”

“But there are so few of them left, Papa Garamask! And they become fewer and fewer. So is it not imperative that we kill them, much as we respect and love them?”

“If there were millions of them left, would you kill them?”

“No, certainly not. That would be an abomination. Why should we kill them if there were many of them? They are so greatly above us that we will do anything for them.”

“Even kill them, Chavo, to show how much you love them? And why did you try to kill me during my battle with Sinek?”

“For mixed reasons. First, you have a dignity of aspect, and you seemed almost like a Rogha to me as you were embattled there. I respect and love you almost as much as I do any of the Rogha. And then, it has been discovered that World-men will do as well as the Rogha for us, and companions of mine were waiting below the crag to tear you apart if you should fall there. And we Oganta have an impulse to kill those whom we find in a position to be killed. Very often we kill other Oganta simply because we find them in a vulnerable position. And this, I believe, is irrational of us.”

“I think so too, Chavo. Several small rocks are dancing there on the slope. Do my eyes deceive me? Are they small animals frisking that look so much like rocks?”

“No, they are rocks dancing, Papa Garamask. Your eyes do not deceive you. Here, I will play my hittur again and they dance to it Hear! See! Is that not nimble music, Papa Garamask?”

“I’d call it something else. Dammit, Chavo, must I ask the obvious question? What makes the rocks dance?”

“I make the rocks dance, Papa Garamask, or my dark companion does. Why are you surprised? The same thing is done on World?”

“If it is, I have not heard of it.”

“But it is. On World, so I have been told, one young person in ten has a dark companion, and a World-German name is given to this. But in both cases, the dark companion is a satellite of self. On World, I am told, the fact is often hidden or denied. But here, where the majority of us are

capable of projecting the dark satellite, there is no way to hide it. Besides, it is fun. Watch me rock and sway that bush as if I were a wind. See!”

“Weird oaf, you have a poltergeist!” Garamask was interested in this thing.

“Yes, that is your World-word. No, I am a poltergeist. And I am also a visible creature. It used to be that, with time, we would give up one form or the other: stand clear of the dark body and be visible creatures only; or decay the body and be spook only. But now, in the time of waiting of the Oganta, we have both forms, and we are not able to go beyond these forms.”

“This is a time of waiting for you, Chavo? What do you wait for?”

“To see what will happen to us. It is a very uneasy time of waiting. It’s so narrow a ladder, and so few of us can climb it at one time. And at the top, it is not, what it once was, not what it should be.”

“I am going to sleep now, Chavo, and I do not want to hear your damnable instrument or your voice again this night,” Garamask said evenly. “But how do I know that you will not kill me while I sleep?”

“Papa Garamask, would an Oganta violate the night!”

“Hell, I don’t know what you’d do! I’m going to sleep.” And he did sleep, angrily and rapidly and deeply. And in the deepest part of Garamask’s sleep, Allyn loomed up there, standing a slight distance up on Giri Mountain. “Watch the raw cub Chavo,” the looming Allyn called down to Garamask; “He is not so clever as was Ocras, but you are not so clever as was I.” “I am every bit as clever as you, Allyn,” Garamask told the appearance. “Now tell me what it was that you were so close to finding out when you died. Give me something to go on.” But Allyn did not hear Garamask. He had come to speak and not to listen. “I was so very close to it then, Allyn called again. “Avenge me on Ocras, Garamask, whatever he is now. I’d do as much for you.” “I will continue my sleep, Allyn,” Garamask told him, “and I do not want to hear any more dead-man talk from you tonight unless you have something new to tell me.” And Garamask continued his sleep.

He woke eagerly and easily at first gray light. “First sun should not find me at this mountain-foot either,” Garamask told himself silently. “I see the ledge where I should catch first sun. There is always the ledge above; mountaining would not be mountaining without it. Treorai the Rogha told me that the Oganta are not morning types. Let me see.”

Garamask hooted and hollered at Chavo, then kicked him awake. Amused, he, watched the oaf fall back to sleep again, then kicked him awake the second time. "It must be my dark companion, it could not be myself who does this." Garamask laughed. "But it is fun." He finally roused the sleepy Chavo. They ate bitter mountain rations.

Clawed and taloned and spiked and armored, they climbed up the Mountain Giri. They took first sun at that ledge above. They rested. Then they climbed again.

Not entirely unpleasant, not so to a man with a strong and traveled nose, not really repugnant; but stark, tall, penetrating, slaving, rampant, murderous, challenging, of a grave-like putridity, of a life-terminal gagging, was the odor, the strong stench that began to pervade the climb on Giri Mountain. There was a person here making himself known. It was Riksino, the cave-bear, the musk~bear, the lord of this middle-mountain. He was at home and he had his flag out.

"No need for me to ask what it is," Garamask said. "He's declared himself. Did I not already know it, I believe that I could guess his very name from his coded stench. He'll be easily found, and I didn't come on a bunt to bypass such a prey. How is the best way? To go to him directly as he waits, and attack him?"

"Papa Garamask, there isn't any best way to fight Riksino," Chavo quaked. "I, am afraid of this person and have always been. He is much rougher and stronger than Sinek or Shasos, or even than Bater-Jeno. He can be killed, he has been killed, I have had a piece of his killing before. But each time it is a great wonder that he can be killed at all, and each time I go in fear and trembling."

"It's catching, oaf," said Garamask. "I feel, a little fear and trembling myself. We'll skirt above, and we'll hunt down on him from above."

But Garamask was very uneasy himself, and his excitement for this part of the hunt was of a sinking sort. He was sick and fevered today. The breaking off of his fang-sheathed eyeteeth in his yesterday's battle with Sinek had swollen his face from eyes to throat. His whole face and head ached, his throat was sore, and he was slobbering through the unaccustomed gaps. Moreover, his shredded ear was bothering him. Even a very strong man suffers under heavy gravity if he is sick.

And they would have difficulty skirting above Riksino, and hunting down on him from above. Riksino was shuffling upward, keeping pace

with them. His personal stench rose higher and higher. They had his location from it pretty well, though they could not yet see him. So they wore out a few tiring hours and ascended most of the mountain.

“This will have to be the Big Riksino, the King Riksino,” said Chavo. “None other ever dens so high, and no Riksino will fight except in the mouth of his den. This is the first time that the Big Riksino has returned since he was last killed more than two equivalent years ago.”

“You really believe that the same animals return to life?” Garamask asked him.

“The Rogha do not believe it, Papa Garamask, but we Oganta believe it. And yet, it may be that when a Riksino grows larger and stronger than any of the others, he will go up and occupy the old den of the Big Riksino as a sign that he is now the king. I have fought with riksinos before, but never with the Big Riksino, and I am afraid. Be assured that he will be very large and fierce.”

“I see him,” said Garamask when they had climbed a while further, “and he is big. I’ll go after him, since he doesn’t seem to make up his mind.”

“What you see is not Big Riksino,” said Chavo, “and none other will fight while the big one is on the mountain. Besides, as you notice, he has not the full stench.”

“It’s full enough for me,” Garamask gawked out of his sore throat “I’ll have him.”

Garamask rushed the animal. It reared up roaring, half again the man’s height. It batted big paws around in the air and opened a big mouth. Garamask went in low, knifing the back legs of the animal with toes and knees knives, ripping its belly with his skull saber, delivering terrible blows on its loins with his hand claws. The animal toppled over backward, rolled, scrambled up, and ran away howling. And Garamask shambled after it, not at all able to catch it unless it should slow.

“It is no good that you chase it, Papa Garamask,” Chavo called. “That is not Big Riksino. It is only a pup that runs away like a pup. Do not waste the day chasing a callow pup.”

“I seem to spend several days climbing the mountains with one,” Garamask panted. He was tired, and he had been a fool. The real stench, the king stench was still high above him, and he had only blooded a whimpering whelp. He climbed, he climbed. Then the stench stood and

prevailed. The riksino person was waiting, quite near.

“We are almost to the top of Giri Mountain” said Garamask, “and his den cannot be any higher. We will reach that ridge, and we will follow it to the left till we are above him. It’s all clear rock above. His den will have to be in that jumble somewhere just below the ridge.”

They were onto a fearful and crumbling ledge, crawling along it, Garamask in the lead. It is an awkward sort of crawl with toe and knee sabers in place. Garamask began to sight in on the very large animal. He could hear it panting and gnashing now, and he smelled it overpoweringly. He could hear it scratching big claws on the rocks; he could even hear the blood pounding in it, the strong pulse. But when he first saw it, paralyzingly close, it was the inside of it that he saw.

He was looking into the open mouth of it, a meter across, two meters below him. Then, in a flick, half of Garamask’s nose was gone as he peered, fascinated, too close. The animal was in a strain with its forepaws extended as high as he could reach; and one of its high traveling claws had caught the leaning~over Garamask in the face.

Garamask had claws of his own. Angrily he raked the backs of Riksino’s paws with his own hand talons when the big bear was extended on the rock as high as he could reach. Using his own bloody face for bait, Garamask counter-clawed every time the bear struck up at him. He found the animal slow and witless. The animal closed its gaping mouth once, drew back its great front limbs, and licked its bleeding paws. Garamask let himself half over the ledge and raked the animal’s muzzle terribly with his heel saber. He half-blinded it with the slash, either cutting one of its eyes out or filling it so full of blood that the animal could not use it. And Garamask was back on the ledge before Riksino could slash out at him again.

The riksino bear crouched low on four feet, gathered himself, and leaped up toward the ledge. He got his great forepaws over it and hung on. Garamask slashed the big paws pulpy with his foot sabers, and then gashed the animal full in the face again and again and again as it hung there. The paws slipped off, and the animal slipped back to the lower level. And yet it was of such great, size, had so much blood and meat in it, that this little whittling that Garamask had done could have very little effect on it.

“Bear, you’re a stumble-bum, but a big stumble-bum,” Garamask

talked. “What? What? You’re turning something else on? Have you more exudations than your stench? What do you do, bear?”

The riksino bear had reared up again and opened its great mouth. And now it reeked with an influence on another level from its stench.

“Papa Garamask, do not fall!” Chavo called. “Do not fall into the open mouth of the Riksino.”

“You fool! Why should I fall into the bear’s mouth?” Garamask asked in amazement. “Bear, bear, you turn it on, do you? What are you, an amateur hypnotist? It might get you the birds and the small game, not a man. Turn it on, bear, turn it on as strong as you can! The Garamask will never be so fascinated as to fall into a bear’s mouth.”

And Garamask fell head-first into the mouth of the riksino bear.

From above there was another roaring, terrified and hysterical, and a third weight came down heavily. From the bowels of the riksino came an agonizing groan; and Garamask was being crushed to death, but not instantly. His skull spike aided him. His elbow sabers, for he was in to the maw of the animal beyond them, did slashing service. Then he was crushed in together in spite of them and his head began to split open. And then he was crushed no more, as his enveloping cosmos went limp.

And after a while lie was climbing again, up to the top of Giri Mountain. He was alive, more or less, and he was dazed and gagging. Had it all been a bloody dream, the fight with Riksino? Chavo was booming as offensively as ever, but the thing had not been a dream.

“I save your life, Papa Garamask,” Chavo boomed. “Am I not wonderful? I kill the Big Riksino in the throat while he is straining there to crush you in his gullet. The Big Riksino can think of only one thing at a time, and the Big Chavo can knife through even the thickest strained sinews very rapidly when he is given a free way to it. There is no other way that Riksino can be killed but by two hunters similarly; but the bait-hunter in the mouth almost always dies.”

“You tried to kill me after Sinek had fallen off the mountain to his death, Chavo,” Garamask panted. “Why did you not let the Riksino kill me, since you want nie dead?”

“The way the Riksino kills, you would be of no use to us dead,” said Chavo. “He devours too rapidly.”

“And otherwise I would be of some use to you dead, Chavo?”

“Dead, very freshly dead, or still dying, you would be of greatest use to



us,” Chavo said blandly. “Dying or new dead, you will represent our ultimate hope.”

Just at last sun they came to the top of Giri Mountain, the second mountain of Three-Mountain. They ate bitter mountain rations, and Chavo dabbled medicaments on Garamask’s wounds.

“Were you to survive the mountain hunt (and you will not) you could get a new nose made and be beautiful again,” said Chavo. “Now, I suppose, you must live noseless until your death the tomorrow sun-fall. Or shall I attempt to make you a surrogate nose from the wood of this thorn-bush here?”

“Don’t bother, Chavo. I’m going to sleep.”

But Garamask was not going to sleep. Chavo took his stringed hitfur from his pack and played his damnable music and sang.

“Chavo!” Garamask spoke sharply. “Do you know why Spain on World fell from the highest nation in Europe to the lowest within one generation?”

“Perhaps they offended the frog-god.”

“No. No, we have no frog-gods on World.”

“What? What? Are you sure? No frog-gods on World? You dash me down.”

“A devilish Arab, angered by the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain, brought a guitar into that unfortunate country. It was adopted. So that unfortunate country fell, its once noble soul shriveled into a miserable whiney-ness.”

“I understand, Papa Garamask,” said Chavo, still strumming. “They fell, as though the noble Rogha should fall to become ourselves Oganta.”

“A good parallel, Chavo. And once in the Pacific Ocean on World, there was a noble kingdom of Hawaii. A sea-faring man introduced the guitar there, and the noble kingdom soon begged to be accepted into servitude by a land-nation.”

“Yes, of course that would be the effect, Papa Garamask. We Oganta would accept such servitude gladly, but there is no longer anyone to accept us into it.”

“My own land, the Conglomerate States, fell similarly,” said Garamask sadly. “And once it had been a noble land.”

“The noble Rogha, of course, despise the instrument,” Chavo mourned. “But to us it is the Shetra, the holy instrument. It is our

religion. It is our love.”

“It is the noise of accepted inferiority in all things.”

“Of course it is, Papa Garamask. And who are more or than ourselves, the Oganta? But we will give it up, we promise this, if we are ever able to give up being Oganta.”

“Oh, go to sleep, Chavo!”

“But you say that you have no frog-gods on your world, and yet you have frogs? And we have our frog-gods, and, have no frogs except those introduced from World. And these are small frogs that have been imported. The largest of them can be held in the two hands. I dream about the frogs of World. How big are they, Papa Garamask? As big as the King Riksino?”

“Oh no. You’ve a completely mistaken idea, Chavo. The frogs on World are the same as the frogs imported here from World. The most of them you could hold in one hand.”

“Are you sure? They are not as big as myself? They are not even as big as yourself?”

“No, no, Chavo. They are quite small. I’ve often wondered about the frog-cult on Paravath. What is the meaning of it?”

“You dash me d6wn again, Papa Garamask. There should be frogs of great size. Why, the frog is the most wondeuful of all creatures! It is the only one that is able to make the frog-leap easily. Oh, may that thing come back to us!”

“Go to sleep, you damnable oaf.”

Chavo sighed deeply. “I dream about frogs,” he murmured. Then he did seem to go to sleep.

Allyn came then, but he was a thinner and more vapory Allyn than in his previous appearances to Garamask.

“The Shasos, the eagle-condor, isn’t very hard to kill,” said Allyn. “He will attack you when you are roping up the cliff face, of course; for there is no other time he will fight. If you can belay yourself on the rope, and if you are not overpowered with fear, you have a chance. Wring his neck like a chicken if you can, for he is a chicken.

“But he will rip you apart to get to your kidneys and spleen if he can. Prevent him in this! He will gobble your eyes out of your head. Let him not do this! Let him not do it with both of them, at least, or you are at a disadvantage.”

“Allyn, I will go as far as you went,” said Garamask. “I’m as good a man as you ever were. Tell me now, what is the mystery at the end of it that you didn’t find out till you died? What is peculiar about the final prey, the Bater-Jeno? What were you on to, Allyn?”

But wraiths are notoriously hard of hearing.

“You will do well to weaken the bridge after you have crossed over it, and to keep your gaze always fixed on the back of your head,” the dead-man Allyn said. Then he became thinner, and he was gone.

Garamask again woke eagerly and easily at first gray light. His face and his throat were not as sore as they had been. Though bereaved in ear and nose, he was happy. He lifted up his heart to the morning. Enjoyably, he kicked Chavo the Oganta awake, for the Oganta are not morning types.

They ate bitter mountain rations, donned sabers and claws and spikes and armor, and began to climb Bior Mountain, the third and highest mountain of Three-Mountain. Here it was steep and sheer, Bior a saber mountain rising out of its sheath which was Giri Mountain. It was a different sort of hunt now, and a climb in a different element.

There were the slanting slick shields of rock, and the slanting slick grass and cobble-moss. There were the rodents and poke-snakes that ate the grass and the moss and slithered over the rocks. There were the great birds that stood in from the tall skies and ate the rodents and poke-snakes. The greatest of these birds was the Shasos, the eagle-condor.

“Is it with Shasos as it was with the first two prey: that there are many of them, and that there is one special one?” Garamask asked Chavo.

“Yes, it is Shasos himself who will attack, and the others will not. It is the big Shasos himself whom we have to fear, he who nests on the third moon.”

“Moon-brained muggledoon! Where do the other Shasos nest, Chavo?”

“On the second moon. The less noble of the large birds nest on first moon, and small birds nest on Paravath itself. I am told that you do not have such large birds as Shasos on World.”

“There are no birds on World so large as those three swooping there now, Chavo. Are they Shasos?”

“No, Papa Garamask, they are of the less noble of the big birds, Cejer-Birds. When we are a little higher in the sky we will come to the hunting cliffs of Shasos. Now I will climb up here dangerously, and then I will run

a line down. We will be running many of these lines.”

The oafish Chavo could climb. He oozed up the overhanging rock like slightly viscous oil. He climbed with all his armor, and he seemed sure of his grip on these rocks that were slick with cobble-moss.

From forty meters above he let down a line, and Garamask climbed it — very tiring work.

“What was to keep you from letting me fall with the line?” Garamask asked Chavo when they were up to that next hint of a ledge in the rocks.

“Would an Oganta violate the sanctity of the line?” Chavo asked him.

It was a very long hard day. Garamask went up long lines a dozen times, terriying overhangs out over nothingness. Slate-gray clouds were below them, and Paravath could no longer be seen below. The grass and cobble-moss became stronger, shattering the rocks with their growth and making them all very soft and dangerous. The rodents and poke-snakes became larger; and there were larger birds that stood in from the stark sky to prey on them. This was fearful exaltation here, stunning heeight without support. First moon, cragged and misshapen in the day-sky, seemed nearer than the glimpses of Paravath below. Indeed, the little first moon was only eight times the distance from Mountain-Foot.

“There is shasos, and there, and there,” said Chavo as they were resting on an imaginary ledge, actually only a band of discoloration on the rock. “But it is not yet Shasos himself. Quite soon he, though.”

Garamask followed Chavo up several quite difficult stretches, refusing to let a line be strung. And, then there loomed above them a very long and very difficult overhang that Garamask knew he would never be able to climb.

“It is the line again here, Chavo,” he said, “and I hate to be dependent on you. Can even you climb this?”

“I can climb this, and it is the hardest of the climbs. But first I will tell you something here. It is at this place, on the line that I will drop, that you will have your encounter with Shasos. He is out there now, the black dot in the sky, sleeping on furled wings, motionless. But he sleeps with one eye open, and watches. He will attack you midway in your climb up the line. He will rip you apart to get to your kidneys and spleen. He will gobble the eyes out of your head.”

“So I’ve been told by another, Chavo. Yes, I remember birds in legend eating the spleen and liver of a certain one forever.”

“I suppose that World-birds and World-gods eat the spleen, Papa Garamask, to bring them through their time of change. Here we require a different food.”

Chavo the amazing Oganta climber went up the longest and most dangerous climb, flowing like oil up the cliff. He disappeared and reappeared to Garamask four different times, following the contours of the cliffs, and then he seemed to achieve a real base. Soon the very thin line, one hundred meters of it, came down; and Garamask began the very tiring climb up it.

Halfway up he was arm and leg weary and sick, and he heard the sky-whistle. It was the wings of big Shasos powering toward him. Garamask wrapped his legs in the line, having achieved at that point a slope that supported him slightly, and waited the attack with fist, elbow, and skull knives flashing.

“Like Prometheus bound to the rock for the attack of the great birds!” he said. “And why did I never realize that it had to be a high rock in the sky he was bound to?”

Shasos had a wingspan of perhaps twenty meters, and a great head with sickle jaws. In actual body the bird was about the same size as Garamask.

Shasos was in fast, slashed Garamask deeply over the groin, and Garamask jagged the bird still more deeply in the back of the head. The line twisted with Garamask. On the second swoop Shasos got Garamask in the small of the back, and Garamask countered effectively again into the bird-head. Again, and Shasos gaped open Garamask’s lower side, held there, had him now ripped open fore and aft; and perhaps he did eat somewhat of the spleen. But Garamask smote half through the head of the creature, and Shasos staggered in the air.

“I have you now,” Garamask revealed. “You die a-winging. But now you come the last time, and you come for the eyes. You’ll gobble them out of my head, will you? ‘Do not let him do it to both of them or you will be at a disadvantage,’ the dead man Allyn told me. Have at me, chicken! It’s the end of you.”

Shasos did slash Garamask over his eye, and something was hanging down the man’s cheek. Whether it was a fold of flesh or the eye itself Garamask did not know. He had fist claws into the throat of Shasos, into the long stringy neck that was sinewed like a cable. He strained, and the

sinews gave a little. Then they gave up completely. He wrung Shasos' neck like a chick for he was a chicken. And the big broken bird fell a leaf toward the slate-gray clouds below.

"I'm ripped up pretty gapingly," Garamask said, "but nothing is looping out of me. I was always a sound man in my entrails. It's up the weary climb again, and to find the fourth prey that is the mystery to me and was the death of Allyn."

So Garamask completed the very tiring climb up the line. He was met by the oafish grinning face of Chavo. They were on top of Bior Mountain, the third mountain of Three-Mountain.

"I have a nice surprise for you," Chavo boomed. "I will ready it for you while you rest."

"I have two surprises for you," said Garamask, "and I will have them ready in due time."

You will do well to weaken the bridge after you have crossed it, and to keep your gaze fixed on the back of your head, the dead man Allyn had said. Chavo was busy with his surprise. Garamask weakened the bridge he had just crossed, the line he had climbed, gashing it with heel saber. He didn't cut it through. It would still, he believed, support his weight going down, if he had guessed wrong, and if he would not have to seek another way down. But the line would not now support a weight several times greater than Garamask's.

"I am soldering a device to a deep boulder," Chavo said. "You from World do not understand rock-soldering, but you will not be able to get this device loose to fling it off the mountain; and you will not be able to silence it."

"And I am doing a thing of my own," said Garamask, and he had cut a small teleor tree with his heel saber and was trimming it with his fist claws. "We are on top of Bior Mountain, Chavo, and it is a small flat top; and there is nobody here but ourselves. Where is the fourth prey, the Bater-Jeno, called either the crag-ape or the frog-man?"

"Bater-Jeno is here," said Chavo. "He sets his signature, as surely as Riksino set his own below."

Garamask had hurriedly sliced a length of line from Chavo's pack as the sound began, a stronger thing than even the stench of Risino. With the line, Garamask lashed the teleor pole to one of his elbow sabers that he had removed. Then it was over him like putrid waves, the gagging

cacophony of hittur music and Oganta singing. It was a recorder that Chavo had soldered to the rock, but Garamask had a good long spear now.

“You will not be able to silence the playing, Papa Garamask,” Chavo chortled. “It will drive you bugs in your last moments. And Bater-Jeno is here. He is myself. Or he is yourself. Come and face me and we will find out which.”

Garamask knocked Chavo down with the butt-end of the teleor-tree spear. Chavo had not even noticed it. Then Garamask put the blade to the Oganta’s chest, just below the throat armor.

“You have violated the weapon code,” Chavo complained.

“Not really, Chavo. I’ll give up my edge and fight the fourth prey even, after we have talked. If I do go to my death now, I do not want to go fuzzy in my facts as Allyn did. Quick now, Chavo. Talk! Where is the person Ocras who killed Allyn? Is he really dead?”

“Dead? No, Papa Garamask, he is translated. Ocras (the hunger) has become Treorai, a noble Rogha. You have talked to this Treorai. It was he who ate the backbrains of your friend Allyn, and so was transformed.”

“Chavo, that hellish music and wailing will burst my brains! What wildness are you saying? The Oganta become Rogha? You are the same species?”

“Pop your head like a pippin, Papa Garamask, drive you bugs. We are the same species, the noble Rogha and the unnoble us. We turn into the Rogha, but now we can no longer turn into them. We have lost the ability to make the frog-leap, except under special stimulus.”

“Seventh Hell! It’s the same noise they have down there. May I never fall so low. What is the frog-mystic, oaf? Talk.”

“The frog-leap, it is our transformation from Oganta to Rogha. What other creature, except the holy frog, changes from a form so unbelievable so suddenly? Strangers believe that we are two different species, as they would believe the tadpole and the frog were two different species. We worship the frog as the high sign of ourselves.”

“What went wrong, oaf? What happened to the transformations? What is the difficulty now? Fill it all in. Nice spear, isn’t it?”

“Nice spear, Papa Garamask, but I cry foul. The difficulty — perhaps a cosmic difficulty. For one hundred equivalent years no Oganta has turned into a Rogha without special stimulus. We generate as Oganta, and we

live out our lives as Oganta, and we are not able to maintain the high civilization of the Rogha. We have lost our adult form, and we try to regain it.”

“How, Chavo? What does the murder of Allyn have to do with this? How did the Oganta Ocras become the Rogha Treorai? What was his special stimulus?”

“To eat the back-brains of a Rogha will transform an Oganta into a Rogha, if both are strong and capable. We calculate that there is enough there to transform four Oganta. We have also discovered (Ocras discovered it in becoming Treorai) that eating the back-brains of certain fully-charged World-men will bring on this transformation in us — those of such World-men who might be able to stay with a mountain-hunt till the fourth prey.”

“Lie still, oaf. I’ll spear you through. What now will happen to Treorai who was Ocras the murderer of Allyn?”

“What will happen to Chavo, the sun-fall murderer of Papa Garamask? Treorai’s time is up, as mine will be after a like period. Treorai has had two equivalent years to grow in wisdom as a Rogha. This very week (he will not know the time) he will be set on and killed, and his back-brains eaten.”

“‘And to keep your gaze fixed on the back of your head,’ the dead-man Allyn told me,” Garamask mused. But the Ocras-Treorai will not die so. I will finish the business up here, and then I will go down and arrest the fellow regularly for the murder.”

“And in place of one Rogha there will be four,” Chavo continued as though he had not heard Garamask. “In this way we will reestablish the Rogha and shorten our time of waiting. When there are again enough Rogha, they in their wisdom will be able to find what went wrong with the transformations; and they will find a less grotesque way to bring them about

“And you yourself, Papa Garamask, do a good deed in your death this sun-fall. From your death there will spring four new Rogha.”

“You violate a code yourself, Chavo. Dying, or freshly dead, I would be good for you. And for four of you? I hear your three companions coming up the line now, so you think you have me fresh? Will the line hold, do you think, Chavo?”

“It will hold. Papa Garamask, you have not violated the code of the



line also?”

“Lie still, oaf. Call it what you will. Oh, it will be close, and I will not slash it again. I stand by my bet. It frays, Chavo, it gives a little, and the highest one of them is so near the top! It gives more! It parts! It breaks! They have fallen, Chavo!”

The Oganta was sobbing and crying noisily on the ground for the death of his friends, and the deathly ineptitude of the recording seemed to give a fitting dirge. Garamask laughed with black amusement, withdrew the spear, unslashed the elbow saber from it and put it on himself again. He looked at the Oganta.

“Get up, Chavo. What is the name of the fourth prey again?”

“It is you, the crag-ape, Papa Garamask, for World-men do look funny to us, and we call you so. Or it is myself, the frog-man, if I can kill you here and now and eat and make the frog-leap. We fight, Papa Garamask, and I eat your back-brains! Hear my battle-cry on the recorder that you cannot turn off! Does it not twang beautifully?”

“Damnable eternal teenagers!” Garamask howled as they closed in bloody battle. “There is enmity between us from the beginning of the worlds! I’ll break you down! I’ll choke you to death with the strings of your own hittur.”

“Papa Garamask, you lie about frogs’ size. I be a very big frog here very soon.”

They fought in the late day on the top of the needle in the sky, gnashing and knifing in their eschatological fury. And one of them would be dead by sun-fall.

## THE MAN UNDERNEATH

Charles Chartel was not the most pleasant man in the world, and as the Great Zambesi he was not the greatest magician. But he was a smart man and a good magician. He had the magnetism of a faith healer, the spirit and appearance of a rooster and a deadly seriousness. He had the patter and the poise and he had learned all that was learnable.

Nor was he a mere pigeon-passer and card-caller. He had inherited, built up, bought and assembled as full a repertoire as any Magic Man in the business.

And, as each must have, he had his specialty: a simple and sound disappearing act. It was nothing really startling; he seemed to underplay it. But it was puzzling and it remained a puzzle even to those in the trade. This one prime trick equated him with the Real Masters who in general technique were a little out of his class. Actually, in the ultimate variation of it, it was the greatest trick.

He put Veronica into a box. And when he opened the box again she was gone. That is all there was to it. The same thing had been performed by dozens of others in many variations.

But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel did not use any of those variations; not, certainly, the trap door-for he had once performed the trick in a wire mesh twenty feet in the air. Besides, he was a cut above the trap-door men.

After showing the empty box he would always take it apart board by board, and pass the boards around for all to handle. He would then assemble it once more into a box, clamp down the cover, unclamp it again, open it, and Veronica would get out of the box.

The Great Boffo swore that the girl never stepped into the box at all.

The Great Boffo, however, could not duplicate the trick. Nor could the Great Thaumaturgos, nor the Great Zebdo.

All of them could make girls disappear from boxes, of course, and could do it in more showy fashion. But, though it was the same thing to the audiences, it was not the same thing to themselves. Their tricks were known to each other and were obvious to any magic man. The special trick of Zambesi-Chartel was not understood and this gave him stature. The only men in the world who do not secretly believe in magic are the magicians, but there was something about the doings of the Great

Zambesi that sowed doubt in them. The Great Vespo, indeed, claimed that he knew how it was done. But Vespo, though brilliant, was an old man and was given to extravagant claims.

The explanation that Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel gave to his audiences will not be given here. Should we repeat it, we would not be believed; we would be laughed at — and we are sensitive. We have not the magnetism of Zambesi to carry off such an outlandish claim as his even though it should be true — and it was. (Actually he said that he sent Veronica down into the Ocean and that he called her back again from that Ocean.)

However, this isn't about the disappearance of Veronica; it is about a matter quite the opposite. And the opposite of the disappearance of Veronica was the appearance of someone who differed from her as much as possible.

This came about at the Tri-State Fair when the New Arena was quite new. The crowd was spirited and the Great Zambesi was in full form. The lighting was perfect and Veronica shone like a jewel set in gold as she stepped into the box that was set up on blocks, clear of the stage. Zambesi closed the box and the crowd had the true feeling of magic about to happen.

And then, with perfect timing, Zambesi-Chartel threw back the front cover as to reveal the box — empty.

We will be hornswatched if that box was empty!

But what rolled out of the box was not Veronica. It was the most woebegone scarecrow of a clown ever seen, the saddest looking man who ever stumbled over his own two feet.

“Holy hamadryads, cramoise, where did you come from?” Zambesi-Chartel breathed without understanding his own words.

The man out of the box was a hobo from a hundred years ago. He wept and wiped his nose with his hand. He had trouble with falling pants and broken shoes and a coat whose sleeve avoided arm. The little clown was good and there was real pathos in his silent humor.

“You've got to get out of here, cnaufer,” Chartel hissed at the little man again and again. “Who are you and how did you get here? Off with you now, cathexis, you're fouling up the act.” But the little man avoided Chartel who would have killed him in all sincerity.

Finally Chartel in his despair closed the box loudly, then opened it

again and brought Veronica out of it. But that didn't get and of the little tramp. He was still cavorting about the stage and he was good. Listen, he was dressed in old black pants and a torn undershirt and one suspender and he walked about the stage.

Then he had on a red sweater and a burglar's cap and black glasses. He still walked about the stage and suddenly he was splendid in evening clothes and monocle. Nobody had done that before.

He became Joe College; he became the man in the charcoal-tan suit; he became an old rowdy-dow on the loose with pearl-gray vest and yellow gloves. Then he became a hobo again-but of a different and worse vesture than before.

"Go away, cistugurium," Veronica whispered angrily, "please g~ away. You're not supposed to be in the act. Who are you anyhow?"

Nobody else had ever completely changed his garb six times in a minute and a half while hobbling about the stage with his hands in his pockets. Nobody else transmuted his shoes from brown to black as he walked in them. The expression of the little man was pathetic and many eyes misted as they watched him.

Then, before the act had begun to drag, the little man wobbled over and fell flat on his face in the box. Zambesi-Chartel closed it and stood poised over it in an intensity of fear and hope. Then he opened the box again. The little man was gone.

Zambesi-Chartel took the box apart board by board and he left it apart. Well, it had been a good act, with an added element. But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel didn't know how he had done it this time — or if he was the one who did it. The trick had always been to make Veronica disappear and appear; there sure hadn't been any little clown in the act before.

"Damn that cressanges anyhow," Chartel grumbled. He was puzzled. He knew that little man — and yet he didn't.

Later that night at the Pepperpot some of the people ate and talked. There were Chartel himself and Veronica; there was Captain Carter who had the trained bears; there were the three Lemon sisters, Dolly, Molly, and Polly. Then another one was with them-for the little man was sitting there and sniffing. He hadn't been there before and he hadn't come in.

"Shall I order for you, claud?" Molly Lemon asked solicitously. But a filled plate was already there and the little man began to eat. He grinned

and he grimaced. He was wearing horn-rim glasses and then he was wearing pince-nez. He had a grin that came shyly as though he were trying it out for the first time.

“Clarence is so cute,” said Dolly Lemon. “We will adopt him into our act if Chartel doesn’t want him.”

There was an empty five-cigar carton on the table. The little man picked it up and it was full. Well, Chartel could duplicate that probably you could yourself, but it would take prop and preparation. The little man pulled a stogie from the carton, puffed on it and it was lit. This also could be done; there are few tricks that cannot be duplicated.

If you are joining the act, cletus, and it seems as though you are,” said Chartel wondering, “you will have to clean up a little.”

Must I really?” asked curt but he obliged at once. He had become as immaculate a dandy as anyone ever saw. “Captain Carter,” he said, “I see from your pocket bulge that you are a drinking man. I ask you to share it with us.”

“It’s empty an hour since,” Captain Carter muttered sadly.

“It wasn’t always empty,” said cylix, the little man. “Let me see if I can restore it.”

“The last time a magician filled an empty whisky bottle for me — and it was none other than old Zambesi-Chartel here — the stuff was not potable. It was the most horrendous rock dew ever distilled.”

“This will be potable,” said celiter — and the bottle filled.

Its content was gloriously potable. It put new life into the party and all of them, except Chartel-Zambesi, had a wonderful time. And if you don’t think you can have fun with a reanimated bottle of whisky and Veronica and the three Lemon sisters you must have a different and more staid definition of fun.

“But all good things must end,” said Captain Carter when the small hours were half grown.

“All good things do not have to end,” said cajetan, the little man, who had been enjoying himself on Polly Lemon’s lap. “The world shriveled when your thought was first put into words. Good things can go on forever, except that — now and then — they must be temporarily adjourned. As long as we understand that partings are only temporary.”

“Oh, we understand that, cuiller,” said the three Lemon sisters. So they temporarily adjourned the party.

But later — and this was after the sun itself was up — Chartel and cyprian were finally alone.

“We will have to have an explanation,” said Chartel. “Who are you?”

“You have no idea, Charles? Did you not take me out of the box? I thought you would know. Did you not call me up?”

“I doubt I did. Do not try to hoax an old hoaxer. Where did you come from that first time? The stage was not trapped and you were not intruded with my knowledge.”

“Was I not? You told the audience how it was done. You said you called me up out of the Ocean.”

“That is my patter — but it doesn’t apply to you. Dammit, ching-hi, where’d you get the Chinese robes and grow that little heard so fast? And how do you make them both change colors so neat? No, chawan, I never called any such fish as you out of the Ocean.”

“In that case I will leave, since I am here through a misunderstanding.”

“Stay a bit, cyfaill. In my patter that is the way I make the girl disappear. How could it make you appear?”

“Charles, I’ve heard you explain the principle dozens of times. I was not in the box. But in a little while I would be in the box. So we adjust the box to a near moment in the future and I am in the box.”

“There’s a lacuna in your logic, clunis,” Chartel said. “Hey, how can you turn into a Hottentot so easily? And not into a real Hottentot either, coya — but into what I would call an old idea of a Hottentot.”

“You did have a good imagination, Charles,” said chabiari. He took up an empty glass, shook it, and it was filled again.

“You’re my master there, cosmos,” said Chartel. “I couldn’t duplicate that without props and you’ve done it three times. How?”

“By our own theory that we worked out so long ago, Charles. I shift it only a little in time and it is done. Anything that has once been full can be filled again by taking it back to the time of its plenitude.”

“Chester, you have a patter that won’t quit. But, if it worked — the idea would be a good one.”

“It does work, Charles. I thought we knew that. We have used it so long.”

“You talk and talk, collard,” said Chartel. “But I still do not know how you can change your whole appearance so easily and often.”

“Why, Charles, we are protean,” said coilon. “That is the sort of man we are.”

It was later the same day that Finnerty, the manager of the show, spoke to Chartel about the little man.

“Your brother from the old country has put new life into the act,” he said. “Keep him in it. We haven’t mentioned money - and I am seldom the one to bring up the subject — but we can settle on a figure. Will it be payable to him or to you?”

“It will be payable to me,” said Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel. Confused he was, but he always knew the top and bottom side of a dollar. Finnerty and Chartel settled on a figure.

“You have been taken for my brother from the old country,” Chartel told cohn a bit later, “and I can see why. I wondered whom you reminded me of. Oh, stop turning into a rooster. If you were shaved and comleed — say, that was quick, contumacel the resemblance would be, is, even closer. You do look like me; you are an extremely handsome man. But I did not know that I had a brother, compuesto, and I do not know what country the old country is — since I was born on Elm Street in St. Louis.”

“Perhaps ‘country’ is a euphemism for something even closer, Charles; and the ‘old country’ may have a special meaning for us. Is it not the name for what is on the other side of your ‘Ocean’?”

“Columkill, you are as phony as — well, metaphor fails me — you are as phony as myself,” said Charles Chartel.

Sometimes the little man was frightening in his wild actions. There wasn’t a mean bone in him, and he was almost universally LIKED. But he did act on impulse. For him, to think was to act. It was good that everybody liked hadn’t they’d have hanged him high.

And always he would multiply things. Chartel begged for his secret.

“We could be rich, cogsworth, really rich,” Chartel would plead.

“But we are already rich, Charles. Nobody has ever had such a rich and perfected personality as we have. You still do not appreciate the greatness of our trick, Charles, though we thought about it for years before we were able to do it. It’s the noblest illusion of them all. Now we are citizens of an abounding world and everything in it is ours. That is to be rich.”

“Consuelo, you are a bleeding doctrinaire. I did not ask for a lecture. I

only ask that you show me how to make a hundred dollars grow where one grew before. I say that is to be rich.”

“I’ve shown you a hundred times, Charles, and you look for more than is in it. You take a thin old wallet that once knew fatness. You restore it to its old state, empty it and restore it again, and so you accumulate. But why do you want money?”

“It is just that I have a passion for collecting it, courlis.”

Collecting we can understand, but the true collector will have no desire for duplicates. Understandably we might want a bill of each size — a one, a five, a ten, a fifty — but we avoid that which once we prized — the ten-thousand dollar bill. The avid people have spoiled it for us. But you have not the true collectors’ spirit, Charles.”

“I have the true money-collectors’ spirit, clendon. Why cannot I duplicate your feats in this?”

“The only reason I can figure, Charles, is that you’re just too duck-knuckled dum1~and it hurts me to say that about one of ourselves.”

But Zambesi-Chartel got a new set of ideas when he saw the trick that cormorant did with an old hat. It was at a rummage sale at which charleroi looked in out of curiosity—he was curious about everything.

“What a pixie must have worn this!” he exclaimed. “What a pixie!”

C held the hat in his hands. And then he held the head in his hands. It was something like a pixie head and it was attached to the body of a young lady. Cisailles kissed the young lady uncommonly about the temporal regions and pressed her to his sternum — for to him impulse was the same as action. And she squealed.

“Not that I mind-but you did startle me,” she chimed. “Who are you? Who, may I ask, am I? And how in pigeon-toed perdition did I get here?”

“You are a pixie, young lady,” said dough, “and as such you are likely to turn up anywhere. I had your hat, so what more natural than that I should call you up to fill it.”

“I am only a part-time pixie, cartier, but I am a full-time housewife. Supper will burn. How do I get back?”

The Man Underneath

“You already are,” said callimachus. And she was. Or at least she was no longer there.

And that was the beginning of the trouble; not for c, not for the young pixie lady, but it was the beginning of the trouble for Charles



(Great Zambesi) Chartel.

Charles knew how it was done now. One cannot continue doing a basic trick in the presence of such a sharpy as Charles Chartel without his learning it. And once he had learned how it was done there was no stopping him.

Charles Chartel was not a bad man underneath, but on the surface he was a rotter. The natural complement of healthy greed that is in every man began to burgeon unnaturally in him. The hard core of meanness spread through his whole being. The arrogance of the rooster became that of the tyrant and envy and revenge burned in him with sulphurous fire.

Chartel now had the key to total wealth, a key that would not only unlock all doors for him, but lock them against others. He set out to get control of the show. To do this he had to break Finnerty, the owner-manager, and buy him out after breaking him.

Business had been good and every night Finnerty had a full cash box. But before a thing is full, it is half full. And before that, it is a quarter full. Every night, just as Finnerty went to count the take, Zambesi-Chartel would play a trick on that box. And it would be only a quarter full. That was not enough to cover expenses.

Finnerty had never been a saving man. He had always trod the narrow green edge between solvency and disaster. And in two weeks he was broke.

Finnerty sold the show and the bookings to Chartel for ten thousand dollars. It made a nice wad in his pocket when he walked away from the show that was no longer his.

But the meanness was running like a tide in Chartel and he wouldn't let it go at that. He emptied the wallet of Finnerty again, taking it hack ten minutes in time. Finnerty felt a certain lightness, and he knew what it was. But he kept on walking.

"It's lucky he left me with my pants," said Finn, "if he has. I'm afraid to look down."

A cloud came over the happy little family that was the show. Veronica felt herself abused and it wasn't imagination. The three Lemon sisters shivered to the chill of a harsh master. So did Carucehi the singer, and Captain Carter and his bears. And c, the little man who was the unwitting cause of it all, took to staying out of the way of the rampaging Chartel.

For Zambesi-Chartel was now avid for praise, for money, for all

manner of meanness. He accumulated coin by every variation of the new trick he had learned. He robbed by it, he burgled the easy way. It is an awful and sickening thing to see a good man grow rich and respected.

“But underneath he isn’t a bad man at all,” Veronica moaned. “Really he isn’t.”

“No, underneath he is a fine man,” said c, the little man of impulse. “Who should know better than I?”

“Why, what do you mean, chadwick dear?” Veronica asked him.

“The same as you. Charles is only bad on the surface. Underneath he’s a tine fellow.”

Well, that may have been. But on the surface, Zambesi-Chartel sure did get rough. He demeaned the dignity of his fellow humans and made them eat dirt by the ton. He went on adrenalin drunks and thrived on the hatred in his own bloodstream. He became a martinet, a propagandist for the Hoop act. He registered Democrat. He switched from perfectos to panatelas and from honest whisky sours to perfidious martinis. He developed a snigger and horselaugh that wilted pigweeds.

“O11, chiot,” said Veronica, “we must do something to save him from himself. We are all involved with him.”

“Who should know better than I?” conehyllatus asked sadly.

Chartel began to drink tea. He started to call a napkin a serviette and to omit every single syllable in “extraordinary.” He switched allegiance from the noble National League to the sniveling American. He defrauded his laborers of their wages, he used scent, he ate vegetarian lunches, he read Walter Lippmann posthumously, he switched from Gumbo Hair Oil to Brilliantine. Once a character begins to deteriorate it goes all the way and in every detail.

Chartel had the Green Sickness, the inordinate love of money.

He obtained the stuff, first by all means fair and foul, then by foul means only. But obtain it he did and it made a sniveling devil out of him.

But the man underneath isn’t bad at all,” Veronica insisted.

Who should know better than I?” caoine said.

The Grand Canyon began with a prairie dog burrow and once it was started there was no stopping it. The downfall of Zambesi. Chartel began over a nickel and then the whole apparatus came down: his wealth, real and phantom — his reputation — the whole blamed complex of the man.

It started with a fist fight he had with a blind newsdealer over a nickel.

It ended with Chartel in jail, indicted, despised, shamed, despondent.

Moreover, public feeling was strongly against him.

Chartel was up on more than twenty counts of theft and pilfering and the nickel stolen from the blind man was by no means the least of them. He was up on a dozen counts of wage fraud. He was charged with multiplex pickpocketing “by device not understood.” They had him on faked bill of sale, dishonest conveyance, simple and compounded larceny, possession of stolen goods, barratry.

“Looks like we have you on everything but chicken-stealing,” the judge said at the hearing.

“We have him on that, too,” said the bailiff. “Five counts of it.”

“You would gag a gannet and make a buzzard belch,” said the judge. “I’d crop your ears if that law still obtained. And if we can find a capital offense in all this offensiveness I’ll have your head. It is hard to believe that you were once human.”

Chartel was shamed and sick of heart and felt himself friendless. That night he attempted to hang himself in his cell. The attempt failed for reasons that are not clear but not for any lack of effort on his part. It is worthy of note that the only persons who ever attempt to take their own lives are rather serious persons.

“We will have to go to him at once, cristophe,” said Veronica. “We must show him that we still love him. He’d sicken a jackal the way he’s behaving, but he isn’t really like that. The man underneath —”

“Hush, Veronica, you embarrass me when you talk like that,” said ciahhach. “I know what a prince is the man underneath.”

Little C went to visit the Great Zambesi-Chartel in his cell.

“It is time we had a talk,” he said.

“No, no, it’s too late for talk,” said Charles Chartel.

“You have disgraced us both, Charles,” said celach. “It goes very deeply when it touches me.”

“I never even knew who you were, little c. You are protean and you are not at all plausible.”

“You called me up and you still don’t know who I am, Charles? But this was our finest trick, our greatest illusion on which we worked subconsciously for years. We are our own masterpiece, Charles. And you didn’t recognize it when it happened. You are the Magic Man but I am the Magic Man run wild. Aye, Charles, he’s best when he runs wild.”

“Tell me, cicerone, who are you? Who am I?” Chartel begged.

“What is my difficulty?”

“Our difficulty, Charles, is that one of us became too serious,”

Camefice tried to explain. “To be serious is the only capital crime. For that, one of us will have to die — but it isn’t as though it were a serious matter. Every man is at least two men, but ordinarily the two are not at the same time bodied arid apparent. Now you have marred our greatest trick — but it was fun while it lasted.”

He signaled to Veronica and she came down the corridor with a bunch of boards under her arm. She was admitted to the cell by the puzzled jailor.

One of us will have to leave forever,” coquelicot told Charles Chartel. “It isn’t right for both of us to be around.” “Ah, I will be sorry to see you go, chandos,” said Chartel. “But who are you? I never could remember your name properly and there is something weird about that. You change forever in appearance and name. Who are you, little c?” “Only that. Just little c. Or shall we say sube? But we are too clever to be hounded into a hole like this, Charles. Remember! We were our own greatest trick, even if it failed.”

“What must we do now?” Chartel asked dully.

“A simple transference,” cogne said. He was building the box board by board.

“I’m not a bad man underneath,” Chartel sniveled. “I’m misunderstood.”

“No, we’re a fine man underneath, Charles. I am the man underneath,” said dud. “Get in the box.”

“I get in? I am Charles (the Great Zamheei) Chartel. You are only little c, sube, an aspect of myself. I will not get into the box!”

“Get in, Charles,” said cistercium. “It was a mix-up from the beginning. You were never meant to see the light of day. The wrong one of us has been running loose.”

“I’ll light, Ill claw, I’ll rant!”

“That’s what a healthy subconscious is supposed to do,” cludok said. “Get in!”

“It’s murder! I won’t got It’s oblivion!”

“No such thing, Charles. It isn’t as though we weren’t the same person. I’ll still be here.”

Then little c and Veronica shoved the Great Zambesi Charles Chartel down into the box and closed the lid. In doing so, little c became himself the Great Zambesi. For, when he opened the box again, it was empty. And he took it apart board by board. The jailor said that he had to have his prisoner and Veronica gave him the boards.

“There, there, doll,” she said. “Make one out of them. Try real hard.”

And Veronica and the Great Zambesi left that place.

We won't say that Zambesi wasn't the greatest magician in the world. He may have become the greatest, after he began to treat it lightly. People, he was good! There was never any act with such variety and fun in it. After his strange mid-life hiatus he achieved new heights.

“And I'm certainly glad you overcame your personality difficulties,” the loving Veronica told him later. “For a while there — whoof! But I always knew you were a fine man underneath.”

## INCASED IN ANCIENT RIND

### 1

*The eye is robbed of impetus  
By Fogs that stand and shout:  
And swiftness all goes out from us  
And all the stars go out.*

*—Lost Skies  
O'Hanlon*

“Wear a mask or die,” the alarmists had been saying louder and louder; and now they were saying “Wear a mask and die anyhow.” And why do we so often hold the alarmists in contempt? It isn't always a false alarm they sound, and this one wasn't. The pollution of air and water and land had nearly brought the world to a death halt, and crisis was at hand as the stifling poison neared critical mass.

“Aw, dog dirt, not another air pollution piece,” you say.

Oh, come off of it. You know us better than that. This is not such an account as you might suppose. It will not be stereotype, though it may be stereopticon.

“The lights are burning very brightly,” said Harry Baldachin, “this club room is sealed off as tightly as science can seal it, the air conditioning labors faithfully, the filters are the latest perfection, this is the clearest day in a week (likely a clearer day than any that will ever follow), yet we have great difficulty in seeing each other's face across the table. And we are in Mountain Top Club out in the high windy country beyond the cities. It is quite bad in the towns, they say. Suffocation victims are still lying unburied in heaps.”

“There's a curious thing about that though,” Clement Flood said. “The people are making much progress on the unburied heaps. People aren't dying as fast as they were even a month ago. Why aren't they?”

“Don't be so truculent about it, Clement,” Harry said. “The people will die soon enough. All the weaker ones have already died, I believe, and the strong ones linger awhile; but I don't see how any of us can have lungs left. There'll be another wave of deaths, and then another and another. And all of us will go with it.”

“I won’t,” said Sally Strumpet. “I will live forever. It doesn’t bother me very much at all. just makes my nose and eyes itch a little bit. What worries me, though, is that I don’t test fertile yet. Do you suppose that the pollution has anything to do with my not being fertile?”

“What are you chattering about, little girl?” Charles Broadman asked. “Well, it is something to think about. Gathering disasters usually increase fertility, as did the pollution disaster at first. It has always been as though some cosmic wisdom was saying ‘Fast and heavy fruit now for the fruitless days ahead.’ But now it seems as if the cosmic wisdom is saying ‘Forget it, this is too overmuch.’ But fertility now is not so much inhibited as delayed,” Broadman continued almost as if he knew what he was talking about.

Sally Strumpet was a bright-eyed (presently red-eyed) seventeen-year-old actress, and that was her stage name only. Her real name was Joan Struthio, and she was met for club dinner with Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, and Charles Broadman, all outstanding in the mentality set, because she had a publicity man who arranged such things. Sally herself belonged to the mentality set by natural right, but not many suspected this fact: only Charles Broadman of those present, only one in a hundred of those who were entranced by Sally’s rather lively simpering, hardly any of the mucous-lunged people.

“This may be the last of our weekly dinners that I am able to attend,” Harry Baldachin coughed. “I’d have taken to my bed long ago except that I can’t breathe at all lying down any more. I’m a dying man now, as are all of us.”

“I’m not, neither the one nor the other,” Sally said. “Neither is Harry,” Charles Broadman smiled snakishly, “not the first, surely, and popular doubt has been cast on the second. You’re not dying, Harry. You’ll live till you’re sick of it.”

“I’m sick of it now. By my voice you know that I’m dying.”

“By your voice I know that there’s a thickening of the pharynx,” Charles said. “By your swollen hands I know that there is already a thickening of the metacarpals and phalanges, not to mention the carpals themselves. Your eyes seem unnaturally deep-set now as though they had decided to withdraw into some interior cave. But I believe that it is the thickening of your brow ridges that makes them seem so, and the new bulbosity of your nose. You’ve been gaining weight, have you not?”

“I have, yes, Broadman. Every pound of poison that I take in adds a pound to my weight. I’m dying, and we’re all dying.”

“Why Harry, you’re coming along amazingly well. I thought I would be the first of us to show the new signs, and instead it is yourself. No, you will be a very, very long time dying.”

“The whole face of the earth is dying,” Harry Baldachin maintained.

“Not dying. Thickening and changing,” said Charles Broadman.

“There’s a mortal poison on everything,” Clement Flood moaned. “When last was a lake fish seen not floating belly upward? The cattle are poisoned and all the plants, all dying.”

“Not dying. Growing larger and weirder,” said Broadman.

“I am like a dish that is broken,” said the Psalmist, my strength has failed through affliction, and my bones are consumed. I am forgotten like the unremembered dead.”

“Your dish is made thicker and grosser, but it is not broken,” Broadman insisted. “Your bones are not consumed but altered. And you are forgotten only if you forget.”

“Poor Psalmist,” said Sally. This was startling, for the Psalmist had always been a private joke of Charles Broadman, but now Sally was aware of him also. “Why, your strength hasn’t failed at all,” she said. “You come on pretty strong to me. But my own nose is always itching, that’s the only bad part of it. I feel as though I were growing a new nose. When can I come to another club supper with you gentlemen?”

“There will be no more,” Harry Baldachin hacked through his thickened pharynx; “We’ll all likely be dead by next week. This is the last of our meetings.”

“Yes, we had better call our dinners off,” Clement Flood choked. “We surely can’t hold them every week now.”

“Not every week,” said Charles Broadman, “but we will still hold them. This all happened before, you know.”

“I want to come however often they are,” Sally insisted

“How often will we hold them, dreamer, and we all near dead?” Harry asked. “You say that this has happened before, Broadman? Well then, didn’t we all die with it before?”

“No. We lived an immeasurably long time with it before,” Charles Broadman stated. “What, can you not read the signs in the soot yet, Harry?”



“Just how often would you suggest that we meet then, Charles?” Clement Flood asked with weary sarcasm.

“Oh, how about once every hundred years, gentlemen and Sally. Would that be too often?”

“Fool,” Harry Baldachin wheezed and peered out from under his thickening orbital ridges.

“Idiot,” Clement Flood growled from his thickening throat.

“Why, I think a hundred years from today would be perfect,” Sally cried. “That will be a wednesday, will it not?”

“That was fast,” Broadman admired. “Yes, it will be a wednesday, Sally. Do be here, Sally, and we will talk some more of these matters. Interesting things will have happened in the meanwhile. And you two gentlemen will be here?”

“No, don’t refuse,” Sally cut in. “You are so unimaginative about all this. Mr. Baldachin, say that you will dine with us here one hundred years from today if you are alive and well.”

“By the emphyseman God that afflicts us, and me dying and gone, yes, I will be here one hundred years from today if I am alive and well,” Harry Baldachin said angrily. “But I will not be alive this time next week.”

“And you say it also, Mr. Flood,” Sally insisted.

“Oh, stop putting fools’ words in peoples’ mouths, little girl. Let me die in my own phlegm.”

“Say it, Mr. Flood,” Sally insisted again, “say that you will dine with us all here one hundred years from this evening if you are alive and well.”

“Oh, all right,” Clement Flood mumbled as he bled from his rheumy eyes. “Under those improbable conditions I will be here.”

But only Sally and Charles Broadman had the quick wisdom to understand that the thing was possible.

Fog, smog, and grog, and the people perished. And the more stubborn ones took a longer time about perishing than the others. But a lethal mantle wrapped the whole globe now. It was poison utterly compounded, and no life could stand against it. There was no possibility of improvement, there was no hope of anything. It could only get worse. Something drastic had to happen.

And of course it got worse. And of course something drastic happened. The carbon pollution on earth reached trigger mass. But it didn’t work out quite as some had supposed that it might.

We shamble thorough our longish terms  
 Of Levallosian mind  
 Till we be ponderous Pachyderms  
 Incased in ancient rind.

—Lost Skies  
 O’Hanlon

Oh, for one thing, no rain, or almost no rain fell on the earth for that next hundred years. It was not missed. Moisture was the one thing that was in abounding plenty.

“But a mist rose from the earth and watered all the surface of the ground.”

Rainless rain forests grew and grew. Ten million cubic miles of seawater rose to the new forming canopy and hung there in a covering world-cloud no more than twenty miles up. Naturally the sun and moon and stars were seen no more on the earth for that hundred years; and the light that did come down through the canopy seemed unnatural. But plants turned into giant plants and spread over the whole earth, gobbling the carbon dioxide with an almost audible gnashing.

So there was more land, now, and wetter land. There was a near equipoise of temperature everywhere under the canopy. The winds were all gathered up again into that old leather bag and they blew no more on the earth. Beneath the canopy it was warm and humid and stifling from pole to pole and to the utmost reaches of the earth.

It was a great change and everything felt it. Foot-long saurians slid out of their rocks that were warm and moist again: and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew. Old buried fossil suns had been intruded into the earth air for a long time, and now the effect of their carbon and heat was made manifest. Six-foot-diameter turtles, having been ready to die, now postponed that event: and in another hundred years, in two hundred, they would be ten-foot-diameter turtles, thirteen-foot-diameter turtles.

The canopy, the new lowering copper-colored sky, shut out the direct sun and the remembered blue sky, and it shut out other things that had formerly trickled down: hard radiation, excessive ultraviolet rays and all

the actinic rays, and triatomic oxygen. These things had been the carriers of the short and happy life, or the quick and early death; and these things were no longer carried down.

There was a thickening of bone and plate on all boned creatures everywhere, as growth continued for added years. There were new inhibitors and new stimulants; new bodies for old — no, no — older bodies for old. Certain teeth in certain beasts had always grown for all the beast life. Now the beast life was longer, and the saber-teeth appeared again.

It was murky under the new canopy, though. It took a long time to get used to it-and a long time was provided. It was a world filled with fogs, and foggy phrases.

‘A very ancient and fish-like smell.’

‘Just to keep her from the foggy foggy dew.’

‘There were giants on the earth in those days.’

‘When Enos was ninety years old, he became the father of Cainan. Enos lived eight hundred and fifteen years after the birth of Cainan, and had other sons and daughters.’

‘Behold now Behemoth, which I have made with thee.’

‘And beauty and length of days.’

‘There Leviathan... stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims.

‘I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.’

‘A land where the light is as darkness,’ said Job.

‘Poor Job,’ said Sally Strumpet.

‘This is my sorrow, that the right hand of the Most High is changed,’ said the Psalmist.

‘Poor Psalmist,’ said Sally Strumpet.

The world that was under the canopy of the lowering sky was very like a world that was under water. Everything was incomparably aged and giantized and slow. Bears grew great. Lizards lengthened. Human people broadened and grew in their bones, and lengthened in their years.

‘I suppose that we are luckier than those who come before or after,’ Harry Baldachin said. ‘We had our youths, we had much of our proper lives, and then we had this.’

This was a hundred years to a day (a wednesday, was it not?) since that last club dinner, and the four of them, Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, Charles Broad-man, and Sally Strumpet were met once more in

the Mountain Top Club. Two of them, it will be remembered, hadn't expected to be there.

"What I miss most in these last nine or ten decades is colors," Clement Flood mused. "Really, we haven't colors, not colors as we had when I was young. Too much of the sun is intercepted now. Such aviators as still go up (the blue-sky hobbyists and such) say that there are still true colors above the canopy, that very ordinary objects may be taken up there and examined, and that they will be in full color as in ancient times. I believe that the loss of full color was understood by earlier psychologists and myth makers. In my youth, in my pre-canopy youth, I made some studies of very ancient photography. It was in black and white and gray only, just as most dreams were then in black and white and gray only. It is strange that these two things nearly anticipated the present world: we are so poor in color that we nearly fall back to the old predictions. No person under a hundred years old, unless he has flown above the canopy, has ever seen real color. But I will remember it."

"I remember wind and storm," said Harry Baldachin, "and these cannot now be found in their real old form even by going above the canopy. I remember frost and snow, and these are very rare everywhere on earth now. I remember rain, that most inefficient thing ever — but it's pleasant in memory."

"I remember lightning," said Charles Broadman, "and thunder. Ah, thunder."

"Well, it's more than made up for in amplitude," Clement smiled. "There is so much more of the earth that is land now, and all the land is gray and growing — I had almost used the old phrase 'green and growing,' but the color green can be seen now only by those who ascend above the canopy. But the world is warm and moist from pole to pole now, and filled with giant plants and giant animals and giant food. The canopy above, and the greenhouse diffusion effect below, it makes all the world akin. And the oceans are so much more fertile now — one can almost walk on the backs of the fish. There is such a lot more carbon in the carbon cycle than there used to be, such a lot more life on the earth. And more and more carbon is being put into the cycle every year.

"That's true," said Harry Baldachin. "That's about the only industrialism that is still being carried out, the only industrialism that is still needed: burning coal and petroleum to add carbon to the cycle,

burning it by the tens of thousands of cubic miles. Certain catastrophes of the past had buried great amounts of this carbon, had taken it out of the cycle, and the world was so much poorer for it. It was as if the fruit of whole suns had been buried uselessly in the earth. Now, in the hundred years since the forming or the reforming of the canopy, and to a lesser extent during the two hundred years before its forming, these buried suns have been dug up and put to use again.

“The digging up of buried suns has caused all manner of mischief,” Charles Broadman said.

“You are an old foggy, Charles,” Clement Flood told him. “A hundred years of amplitude have made no change at all in you.

The hundred years had really made substantial changes in all of them. They hadn’t aged exactly, not in the old way of aging. They had gone on growing in a new, or a very old way. They had thickened in face and body. They had become more sturdy, more solid, more everlasting. Triatomic oxygen, that old killer, was dense in the world canopy, shutting out the other killers; but it was very rare at ground level, a perfect arrangement. There was no wind under the canopy, and things held their levels well. How long persons might live now could only be guessed. It might be up to a thousand years.

“And how is the — ah — younger generation?” Harry Baldachin asked. “How are you, Sally? We have not seen you for a good round century.”

“I am wonderful, and I thought you’d never ask. People take so much longer to get to the point now, you know. The most wonderful news is that I now test fertile. When I was seventeen I worried that I didn’t test out. The new times had already affected me, I believe. But now my term has come around, and about time I’d say. I’m a hundred and seventeen and there are cases of girls no more than a hundred who are ready. I will marry this very week and will have sons and daughters. I will marry one of the last of the aviators who goes above the canopy. I myself have gone above the canopy and seen true colors and felt the thin wind.”

“It’s not a very wise thing to do,” said Harry. “They are going to put a stop to flights above the canopy, I understand. They serve no purpose; and they are unsettling.”

“Oh, but I want to be unsettled,” Sally cried.

“You should be old enough not to want any such thing, Sally,” Clement Flood advised. “We are given length of days now, and with them

wisdom should come to us.”

“Well, has wisdom come?” Charles Broadman asked reasonably. “No, not really. Only slowness has come to us.”

“Yes, wisdom, we have it now,” Harry Baldachin insisted. “We enter the age of true wisdom. Long wisdom. Slow wisdom.”

“You are wrong, and unwise,” Charles Broadman said out of his thickened and almost everlasting face. “There is not, there has never been any such name or thing as unqualified Wisdom. And there surely are not such things as Long Wisdom or Slow Wisdom.”

“But there is a thing named Swift Wisdom,” Sally stated with great eagerness.

“There was once, there is not now, we lost it,” Charles Broadman said sadly.

“We almost come to disagreement,” Baldachin protested, “and that is not seemly for persons of the ample age. Ah well, we have lingered five hours over the walnuts and the wine, and perhaps it were the part of wisdom that we leave each other now. Shall we make these dinners a regular affair?”

“I want to,” Sally said.

“Yes, I’d rather like to continue the meetings at regular intervals,” Clement Flood agreed.

“Fine, fine,” Charles Broadman murmured. “We will meet here again one hundred years from this evening.”

### 3

*And some forget to leave or let  
And some forget to die:  
But may my right hand wither yet  
If I forget the sky.*

*—Lost Skies  
O’Hanlon*

We are not so simple as to say that the Baluchitherium returned. The Baluchitherium was of an earlier age of the earth and flourished under an earlier canopy. Something that looked very like the Baluchitherium did appear, however. It was not even of the rhinoceros family. It was a horse grown giant and gangly. Horses of course, being artificial animals like dogs, are quite plastic and adaptable. A certain upper-lippiness quickly appeared when this new giant animal had turned into a giant leaf eater and sedge eater (“true” grass had about disappeared: how could it compete with the richer and fuller plants that flourished under the canopy?); a certain spreading of the hoofs, a dividedness more of appearance than of fact, was apparent after this animal had become a swamp romper. Well, it was a giant horse and a mighty succulent horse, but it looked like the Baluchitherium of old.

We are not so naive as to accept that the brontosaurus came back. No. But there was a small flatfooted lizard that quickly became a large flatfooted lizard and came to look more and more like the brontosaurus. It came to look like this without changing anything except its size and its general attitude towards the world. Put a canopy over any creature and it will look different without much intrinsic change.

We surely are not gullible enough to believe that the crinoid plants returned to the ponds and the slack water pools. Well, but certain conventional long-stemmed water plants had come to look and behave very like the crinoids.

All creatures and plants had made their peace with the canopy, or they had perished. The canopy, in its two hundredth year, was a going thing; and the blue-sky days had ended forever.

There was still vestigial organic nostalgia for the blue-sky days, however. Most land animals still possessed eyes that would have been

able to see full colors if there were such colors to be seen; man himself still possessed such eyes. Most food browsers still possessed enough crown to their teeth to have grazed grass if such an inefficient thing as grass had remained. Many human minds would still have been able to master the mathematics of stellar movements and positions, if ease and the disappearance of the stellar content had not robbed them of the inclination and opportunity for such things.

(There was, up to about two hundred years ago, a rather cranky pseudo-science named astronomy.)

There were other vestiges that hung like words in the fog and rank dew of the world.

‘And the name of the star is called Wormwood.’

‘In the brightness of the saints, before the day-star.’

‘It was the star-eater who came, and then the sky-eater.’

“And the stars are not clear in his sight,” said Job.

“Poor Job,” said Sally.

The second hundred years had gone by, and the diners had met at Mountain Top Club again. And an extra diner was with them.

“Poor Sally,” said Harry Baldachin. “You are still a giddy child, and you have already had sons and daughters. But you should not have brought your husband to this dinner without making arrangements. You could have proposed it this time, and had him here the next time. After all, it would only be a hundred years.”

We are not so soft-headed as to say that the Neanderthal Men had returned. But the diners at Mountain Top Club, with that thickening of their faces and bones and bodies that only age will bring, had come to look very like Neanderthals — even Sally a little.

“But I wanted him here this time,” Sally said. “Who knows what may happen in a hundred years?”

“How could anything happen in a hundred years?” Harry Baldachin asked.

“Besides, your husband is in ill repute,” Clement Flood said with some irritation. “He’s said to be an outlaw flyer. I believe that a pickup order for his arrest was put out some six years ago, so he may be picked up at any time. In the blue-sky days he would have been picked up within twenty-four hours, but we move more graciously and slowly under the canopy.



“It’s true that there’s a pickup order out for me,” said the husband. “It’s true that I still fly above the canopy, which is now illegal. I doubt if I’ll be able to do it much longer. I might be able to get my old craft up one more time, but I don’t believe I would be able to get it down. I’ll leave if you want me to.”

“You will stay,” Charles Broadman said. “You are a member of the banquet now, and you and I and Sally have them outnumbered.”

The husband of Sally was a slim man. He did not seem to be properly thickened to joint and bone. It was difficult to see how he could live a thousand years with so slight a body. Even now he showed a certain nervousness and anxiety, and that did not bode a long life.

“Why should anyone want to go above the canopy?” Harry Baldachin asked crossly. “Or rather, why should anyone want to claim to do it, since it is now assumed that the canopy is endless and no one could go above it?”

“But we do go above it,” Sally stated. “We go for the sun and the stars; for the thin wind there which is a type of the old wind; for the rain even — do you know that there is sometimes rain passing between one part of the canopy and another? — for the rainbow — do you know that we have actually seen a rainbow?”

“I know that the rainbow is a sour myth,” Baldachin said.

“No, no, it’s real,” Sally swore. “Do you recall the lines of theolod Vachel Lindsay: ‘When my hands and my hair and my feet you kissed When you cried with your love’s new pain I What was my name in the dragon mist In the rings of rainbowed rain?’ Is that not wonderful?”

Harry Baldachin pondered it a moment.

“I give it up, Sally,” he said then. “I can’t deduce it. Well, what’s the answer to the old riddle? What is the cryptic name that we are supposed to guess?”

“Forgive him,” Charles Broadman murmured to the husband and to Sally. “We have all of us been fog-bound for too long a time below the canopy.”

“It is now believed that the canopy has always been there,” Baldachin said stiffly.

“Almost always, Harry, but not always,” Charles Broadman answered him. “It was first put there very early, on the second day, as a matter of fact. You likely do not remember that the second day is the one that God

did not call good. It was surely a transient and temporary backdrop that was put there to be pierced at the proper times by early death and by grace. One of the instants it was pierced was just before this present time. It had been breached here and there for short ages. Then came the clear instant, which has been called glaciation or flood or catastrophe, when it was shattered completely and the blue sky was seen supreme. It was quite a short instant, some say it was not more than ten thousand years, some say it was double that. It happened, and now it is gone. But are we expected to forget that bright instant?”

“The law expects you to forget that instant, Broadman, since it never happened, and it is forbidden to say that it happened,” Baldachin stated stubbornly. “And you, man, the outlaw flyer, it is rumored that you have your craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I must leave you all for a moment.”

They sat for some five hours over the walnuts and wine. It is the custom to sit for a long time after eating the heavy steaks of any of the neo-saurians. Baldachin returned and left several times, as did Flood. They seemed to have something going between them. They might even have been in a hurry about it if hurry were possible to them. But mostly the five persons spent the after-dinner hours in near congenial talk.

“The short and happy life, that is the forgotten thing,” the husband of Sally was saying. “The blue-sky interval — do you know what that was? It was the bright death sword coming down in a beam of light. Do you know that in the blue-sky days hardly one man in ten lived to be even a hundred years old? But do you know that in the blue-sky days it wasn’t sealed off? The sword stroke was a cutting of the bonds. It was a release and an invitation to higher travel. Are you not tired of living in this prison for even two hundred years or three hundred?”

“You are mad,” Harry Baldachin said.

Well of course the young man was mad. Broadman looked into the young man’s eyes (this man was probably no older than Sally, he likely was no more than two hundred and twenty) and was startled by the secret he discovered there. The color could not be seen under the canopy, of course; the eyes were gray to the canopy world. But if he were above the canopy, Broadman knew, in the blue-sky region where the full colors could be seen, the young man’s eyes would have been sky-blue.

“For the short and happy life again, and for the infinite release,”

Sally's husband was saying. "For those under the canopy there is no release. The short and happy life and scorching heat and paralyzing cold. Hunger and disease and fever and poverty, all the wonderful things! How have we lost them? These are not idle dreams. We have them by the promise — the Bow in the Clouds and the Promise that we be no more destroyed. But you destroy yourselves under the canopy."

"Mad, mad. Oh, but they are idle dreams, young man, and now they are over." Harry Baldachin smiled an old saurian smile. And the room was full of ponderous guards.

"Take the two young ones," Clement Flood said to the thickened guards.

But the laughter of Sally Strumpet shk'ered their ears and got under their thick skins.

"Take us?" she hooted. "How would they ever take us?"

"Girl, there are twenty of them, they will take you easily," Baldachin said slowly. But the husband of Sally was also laughing.

"Will twenty creeping turtles be able to catch two soaring birds on the high wing?" he laughed. "Would two hundred of them be able to? But your rumor is right, Baldachin, I do have my craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I believe I will be able to get the old thing up one more time."

"But we'll never be able to get it down again," Sally whooped. "Coming, Charles?"

"Yes," Charles Broadman cried eagerly. And he meant it, he meant it.

Those guards were powerful and ponderous, but they were just too slow. Twenty creeping turtles were no way able to catch those two soaring birds in their high flight. Crashing through windows with a swift tinkle of glass, then through the uncolored dark of the canopy world, to the rickety craft named Swift Wisdom that would go up one more time but would never be able to come down again, the last two flyers escaped through the pachydermous canopy.

"Mad," said Harry Baldachin.

"Insane," said Clement Flood.

"No," Charles Broadman said sadly. "No." And he sank back into his chair once more. He had wanted to go with them and he couldn't. The spirit was willing but the flesh was thickened and ponderous.

Two tears ran down his heavy cheeks but they ran very slowly, hardly

an inch a minute. How should things move faster on the world under the canopy?

## BOOMER FLATS

“In the tracks of our spiritual father Ivan Sanderson we may now have trailed a clutch of ABSMs to their lair,” the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan was saying in his rattling voice. “And that lair may not be a mountain thicket or rain forest or swamp, but these scrimpy red clay flats. I would almost give my life for the success of this quest, but it seems that it should have a more magnificent setting.”

“It looks like a wild goose chase,” the eminent scientist Willy McGilly commented. But no, Willy was not down-grading their quest. He was referring to the wild geese that rose about them from the edges of the flats with clatter and whistle and honk. This was a flight-way, a chase of theirs. There were hundreds of them if one had the fine eyes to pick them out from the background. “Mud geese,” Willy said. “We don’t see as many of them as when I was a boy.”

“I do not, and I am afraid that I will not, believe in the ABSMs,” said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk, stroking his - (no he didn’t, he didn’t have one) — stroking his jaw, and yet this is the thing that I also have most desired, to find this missing link finally, and to refute all believers in the other thing.”

“We can’t see the chain for the links,” said Willy McGilly. I never believed that any of them was missing. “There’s always been too many of them for the length of the chain: that’s the trouble.” “I’ve traveled a million miles in search of them,” said Arpad. “I’ve pretty well probed all the meager ribs of the world in that travel. My fear has always been that I’d miss them by a trick, even that in some unaccountable way I wouldn’t know them when I found them. It would be ironic if we did find them in such a place as this: not a wild place, only a shady and overlooked place.”

“My own fear has been that when I finally gazed on one I would wake with a start and find that I had been looking in a mirror,” said Velikof. “There must be some symbolism here that I don’t understand. What is your own anticipation of them, Willy?”

“Oh, coming back to people I’ve always liked. There used to be a hunch of them on the edge of my hometown,” Willy McGilly said. “Come to think of it, there used to be a bunch of them on the edge of every hometown. Now they’re more likely to be found right in the middle of every town. They’re the scrubs, you know, for the bottoming of the

breed.”

“What are you talking about, Willy?” Arpad asked sharply. What they were all talking about was ABSMs.

Every town in the south part of that county has a shadow or secondary. There is Meehan, and Meehan Corners; Perkins, and Perkins Corner; Boomer, and Boomer Flats. The three eminent scientists were driving the three miles from Boomer to Boomer Flats looking for the bones, and hopefully even the living flesh, of a legend. It was that of the missing link, of the Abominable Snowman, the ABSM. It wasn't snowy country there, but the so-called Snowmen have been reported in every sort of climate and countryside.

The local legend, recently uncovered by Arpad, was that there was a non-African non-Indian “people of color” living in the neighborhood of Boomer Flats, “between the sand-bush thickets and the river.” It was said that they lived on the very red mud banks of the river, and that they lived a little in the river itself.

Then Dr. Velikof Vonk had come onto a tape in a bunch of anthropological tapes, and the tape contained sequences like this:

“What do they do when the river floods?”

“Ah, they close their noses and mouths and ears with mud, and they lie down with big rocks on their breasts and stay there till the flood has passed.”

“Can they be taught?”

“Some of the children go to school, and they learn. But when they are older then they stay at home, and they forget.”

“What sort of language do they talk?”

“Ah, they don't seem to talk very much. They keep to themselves. Sometimes when they talk it is just plain Cimarron Valley English.”

“What do they eat?”

“They boil river water in mud clay pots. They put in wild onions and greenery. The pottage thickens then, I don't know how. It gets lumps of meat or clay in it, and they eat that too. They eat frogs and fish and owls and thicket filaments. But mostly they don't eat very much of anything.”

“It is said that they aren't all of the same appearance. It is even said that they are born, ah, shapeless, and that — ah — could you tell me anything about that?”

“Yeah. They're born without much shape. Most of them never do get

much shape. When they have any, well actually their mothers lick them into shape, give them their appearance.”

“It’s an old folk tale that bears do that.”

“Maybe they learned it from the bears then, young fellow. There’s quite a bit of bear mixture in them, but the bears themselves have nearly gone from the flats and thickets now. More than likely the bears learned it from them. Sometimes the mothers lick the cubs into the shape of regular people for a joke.”

“That is the legend?”

“You keep saying legend. I don’t know anything about legend. I just tell you what you ask me. I’ll tell you a funny one, though. One of the mothers who was getting ready to bear happened to get ahold of an old movie magazine that some fishers from Boomer had left on the river edge. There was a picture in it of the prettiest girl that anyone ever saw, and it was a picture of all of that girl. This mother was tickled by that picture. She bore a daughter then, and she licked her into the shape and appearance of the girl in the movie magazine. And the girl grew up looking like that and she still looks like that, pretty as a picture. I don’t believe the girl appreciates the joke. She is the prettiest of all the people, though. Her name is Crayola Catfish.”

“Are you having me, old fellow? Have those creatures any humor?”

“Some of them tell old jokes. John Salt tells old jokes. The Licorice Man tells really old jokes. And man, does the Comet ever tell old jokes!”

“Are the creatures long-lived?”

“Long-lived as we want to be. The elixir comes from these flats, you know. Some of us use it, some of us don’t.”

“Are you one of the creatures?”

“Sure, I’m one of them. I like to get out from it sometimes though. I follow the harvests.”

This tape (recorded by an anthropology student at State University who, by the way, has since busted out of anthropology and is now taking hotel and restaurant management) had greatly excited the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk when he had played it, along with several hundred other tapes that had come in that week from the anthropology circuit. He scratched his — (no he didn’t, he didn’t have one) — he scratched his jowl and he phoned up the eminent scientists Arpad Arkabaranan and Willy McGilly.

“I’ll go, I’ll go, of course I’ll go,” Arpad had cried. “I’ve traveled a million miles in search of it, and should I refuse to go sixty? This won’t be it, this can’t be it, but I’ll never give up. Yes, we’ll go tomorrow.”

“Sure, I’ll go,” Willy McGilly said. “I’ve been there before, I kind of like those folks on the flats. I don’t know about the biggest catfish in the world, but the biggest catfish stories in the world have been pulled out of the Cimarron River right about at Boomer Flats. Sure, we’ll go tomorrow.” “This may be it,” Velikof had said. “How can we miss it? I can almost reach out and scratch it on the nose from here.”

“You’ll find yourself scratching your own nose, that’s how you miss it. But it’s there and it’s real.”

“I believe, Willy, that there is a sort of amnesia that has prevented us finding them or remembering them accurately.”

“Not that, Velikof. It’s just that they’re always too close to see.”

So the next day the three eminent scientists drove over from T-Town to come to Boomer Flats. Willy McGilly knew where the place was, but his pointing out of the way seemed improbable: Velikof was more inclined to trust the information of people in Boomer. And there was a difficulty there.

People kept saying “This is Boomer. There isn’t exactly any place called Boomer Flats.” Boomer Flats wasn’t on any map. It was too small even to have a post office. And the Boomer people were exasperating in not knowing about it or knowing the way to it.

“Three miles from here, and you don’t know where it is?” Velikof asked one of them angrily.

“I don’t even know that it is,” the Boomer man had said in his own near anger. “I don’t believe that there is such a place.”

Finally, however, other men told the eminent scientists that there sort of was such a place, sort of a place. Sort of a road going to it too. They pointed out the same improbable way that Willy McGilly had pointed out.

The three eminent took the road. The flats hadn’t flooded lately. The road was sand, but it could be negotiated. They came to the town, to the sort of town, in the ragged river flats. There was such a place. They went to the Cimarron Hotel which was like any hotel anywhere, only older. They went into the dining room for it was noon.

It had tables, but it was more than a dining room. It was a common room. It even had intimations of old elegance in blued pier mirrors. There



was a dingy bar there. There was a pool table there, and a hairy man was playing rotation with the Comet on it. The Comet was a long gray-bearded man (in fact, comet means a star with a beard) and small pieces were always falling on him. Clay-colored men with their hats on were playing dominos at several of the tables, and there were half a dozen dogs in the room. Something a little queer and primordial about those dogs! Something a little queer and primordial about the whole place!

But, as if set to serve as distraction, there was a remarkably pretty girl there, and she might have been a waitress. She seemed to be waiting, either listlessly or profoundly, for something.

Dr. Velikof Vonk twinkled his deep eyes in their orbital caves: perhaps he cogitated his massive brain behind his massive orbital ridges: and he arrived, by sheer mentality, at the next step.

“Have you a menu, young lady?” he asked.

“No,” she answered simply, but it wasn’t simple at all. Her voice didn’t go with her prettiness. It was much more intricate than her appearance, even in that one syllable. It was powerful, not really harsh, deep and resonant as caverns, full and timeless. The girl was big-boned beneath her prettiness, with heavy brindled hair and complex eyes.

“We would like something to eat,” Arpad Arkabaranan ventured. “What do you have?”

“They’re fixing it for you now,” the girl said. “I’ll bring it after a while.”

There was a rich river smell about the whole place, and the room was badly lit.

“Her voice is an odd one,” Arpad whispered in curious admiration. “Like rocks rolled around by water, but it also has a touch of springtime in it, springtime of a very peculiar duality.”

“Not just a springtime; it’s an interstadial time,” Willy McGilly stated accurately. “I’ve noticed that about them in other places. It’s old green season in their voices, green season between the ice.”

The room was lit only by hanging lamps. They had a flicker to them. They were not electric.

“There’s a lot of the gas-light era in this place,” Arpad gave the opinion, “But the lights aren’t gas lights either.”

“No, they’re hanging oil lamps,” Velikof said. “An amusing fancy just went through my head that they might be old whale-oil lamps.”

“Girl, what do you burn in the hanging lamps?” Willy McGilly asked

her.

“Catfish oil,” she said in the resonant voice that had a touch of the green interstadial time in it. And catfish oil burns with a clay-colored flame.

“Can you bring us drinks while we wait?” Velikof of the massive head asked.

“They’re fixing them for you now,” the girl said. “I’ll bring them after a while.”

Meanwhile on the old pool table the Comet was beating the hairy man at rotation. Nobody could beat the Comet at rotation.

“We came here looking for strange creatures,” Arpad said in the direction of the girl. “Do you know anything about strange creatures or people, or where they can be found?”

“You are the only strange people who have come here lately,” she told them. Then she brought their drinks to them, three great sloshing clay cups or bulbous stems that smelled strongly of river, perhaps of interstadial river. She set them in front of the eminent with something like a twinkle in her eyes; something like, but much more. It was laughing lightning flashing from under the ridges of that pretty head. She was waiting their reaction.

Velikof cocked a big deep eye at his drink. This itself was a feat. Other men hadn’t such eyes, or such brows above them, as had Velikof Vonk. They took a bit of cocking, and it wasn’t done lightly. And Velikof grinned out of deep folk memory as he began to drink. Velikof was always strong on the folk memory hit.

Arpad Arkabaranan screamed, rose backwards, toppled his chair, and stood aghast while pointing a shaking finger at his splashing clay cup. Arpad was disturbed.

Willy McGilly drank deeply from his own stirring vessel “Why, it’s Green Snake Snorter!” he cried in amazement and delight. “Oh drink of drinks, thou’re a pleasure beyond expectation! They used to serve it to us back home, but I never even hoped to find it here. What great thing have we done to deserve this?”

He drank again of the wonderful splashing liquor while the spray of it filled the air. And Velikof also drank with noisy pleasure. The girl righted Arpad’s chair, put Arpad into it again with strong hands, and addressed him powerfully to his cresting breaker. But Arpad was scared of his lively

drink. “It’s alive, it’s alive,” was all that he could jabber. Arpad Arkabaranan specialized in primitives, and primitives by definition are prime stuff. But there wasn’t, now in his moment of weakness, enough prime stuff in Arpad himself to face so pleasant and primitive a drink as this.

The liquid was sparkling with bright action, was adequately alcoholic, something like choc beer, and there was a green snake in each cup. (Velikof in his notebook states that they were green worms of the species *vermis ebrius viridis*, but that is only a quibble. They were snake-like worms and of the size of small snakes, and we will call them snakes.)

“Do get with it, Arpad,” Willy McGilly cried. “The trick is to drink it up before the snake drinks it. I tell you though that the snakes can discern when a man is afraid of them. They’ll fang the face off a man who’s afraid of them.”

“Ah, I don’t believe that I want the drink,” Arpad declared with sickish grace. “I’m not much of a drinking man.”

So Arpad’s green snake drank up his Green Snake Snorter, noisily and greedily. Then it expired — it breathed out its life and evaporated. That green snake was gone.

“Where did he go?” Arpad asked nervously. He was still uneasy about the business.

“Back to the catfish,” the girl said. “All the snakes are spirits of catfish just out for a little ramble.”

“Interesting,” Velikof said, and he noted in his pocket notebook that the *vermis ebrius viridis* is not a discrete species of worm or snake, but is rather spirit of catfish. It is out of such careful notation that science is built up.

“Is there anything noteworthy about Boomer Flats?” Velikof asked the girl then. “Has it any unique claim to fame?”

“Yes,” the girl said. “This is the place that the comets come hack to.”

“Ah, but the moths have eaten the comets,” Willy McGilly quoted from the old epic.

The girl brought them three big clay bowls heaped with fish eggs, and these they were to eat with three clay spoons. Willy McGilly and Dr. Velikof Vonk addressed themselves to the rich meal with pleasure, but Arpad Arkabaranan refused.

“Why, it’s all mixed with mud and sand and trash,” he objected.

“Certainly, certainly, wonderful, wonderful,” Willy McGilly slushed out the happy words with a mouth full of delicious gooop. “I always thought that something went out of the world when they cleaned up the old shanty town dish of shad roe. In some places they cleaned it up; not everywhere. I maintain that roe at its best must always have at least a slight tang of river sewage.”

But Arpad broke his clay spoon in disgust. And he would not eat. Arpad had traveled a million miles in search of it but he didn’t know it when he found it; he hadn’t any of it inside him so he missed it.

One of the domino players at a near table (the three eminents had noticed this some time before but had not fully realized it) was a bear. The bear was dressed as a shabby man, he wore a big black hat on his head; he played dominos well he was winning.

“How is it that the bear plays so well?” Velikof asked.

“He doesn’t play at all well,” Willy McGilly protested. “I could heat him. I could beat any of them.”

“He isn’t really a bear,” the girl said. “He is my cousin. Our mothers, who were sisters, were clownish. His mother licked him into the shape of a bear for fun. But that is nothing to what my mother did to me. She licked me into pretty face and pretty figure for a joke, and now I am stuck with it. I think it is too much of a joke. I’m not really like this, but I guess I may as well laugh at me just as everybody else does.”

“What is your name?” Arpad asked her without real interest.

“Crayola Catfish.”

But Arpad Arkabaranan didn’t hear or recognize the name, though it had been on a tape that Dr. Velikof Vonk had played for them, the same tape that had really brought them to Boomer Flats. Arpad had now closed his eyes and ears and heart to all of it.

The hairy man and the Comet were still shooting pool, but pieces were still falling off the Comet.

“He’s diminishing, he’s breaking up,” Velikof observed. “He won’t last another hundred years at that rate.”

Then the eminents left board and room and the Cimarron Hotel to go looking for ABSMs who were rumored to live in that area.

ABSM is the code name for the Abominable Snowman, for the Hairy Woodman, for the Wild Man of Borneo, for the Sasquatch, for the Booger-Man, for the Ape-Man, for the Bear-Man, for the Missing Link,

for the nine-foot-tall Giant things, for the living Neanderthals. It is believed by some that all of these beings are the same. It is believed by most that these things are no thing at all, no where, not in any form.

And it seemed as if the most were right, for the three eminent could not find hide nor hair (rough hide and copious hair were supposed to be marks by which the ABSMs might be known) of the queer folks anywhere along the red bank of the Cimarron River. Such creatures as they did encounter were very like the shabby and untalkative creatures they had already encountered in Boomer Flats. They weren't an ugly people: they were pleasantly mud-homely. They were civil and most often they were silent. They dressed something as people had dressed seventy-five years before that time — as the poor working people had dressed then. Maybe they were poor maybe not. They didn't seem to work very much. Sometimes a man or a woman seemed to be doing a little bit of work, very casually.

It may be that the red-mud river was full of fish. Something was splashing and jumping there. Big turtles waddled up out of the water, caked with mud even around their eyes. The shores and flats were treacherous, and sometimes an eminent would sink into the sand-mud up to the hips. But the broad-footed people of the area didn't seem to sink in.

There was plenty of greenery (or brownery, for it had been the dusty weeks) along the shores. There were muskrats, there were even beavers, there were skunks and possums and badgers. There were wolf dens and coyote dens dugged into the banks, and they had their particular smells about them. There were dog dens. There were coon trees. There were even bear dens or caves. But no, that was not a bear smell either. What smell was it?

“What lives in these clay caves?” Velikof asked a woman who was digging river clams there.

“The Giants live in them,” she said. Well, they were tall enough to be giants' caves. A nine-footer need hardly stoop to enter one.

“We have missed it,” Arpad said. “There is nothing at all to be found here. I will travel farther, and I may find it in other places.”

“Oh, I believe we are right in the middle of it,” Velikof gave the opinion.

“It is all around us, Arpad, everything you wanted,” Willy McGilly insisted.

But Arpad Arkabaranan would have none of the muddy water, none of the red sand or the red sand caves, nothing of anything here. The interest had all gone out of him. The three of them went back to the Cimarron Hotel without, apparently, finding primitive creature or missing link at all.

They entered the common room of the hotel again. Dominos were set before them. They played draw listlessly.

“You are sure that there are no odd creatures around this place?” Arpad again asked the girl Crayola Catfish.

“John Salt is an odd creature and he comes from this place,” Crayola told them. “The Licorice Man is an odd creature, I suppose. So is Ape Woodman: he used to be a big-time football player. All three of them had regular-people blood in them; I suppose that’s what made them odd. They were almost as odd as you three creatures. And the Comet playing pool there is an odd one. I don’t know what kind of blood he has in him to make him odd.”

“How long has he been around here?” Velikof asked.

“He returns every eighty-seven years. He stays here about three years, and he’s already been here two of them. Then he goes off on another circuit. He goes out past the planets and among the stars.”

“Oh? And how does he travel out there?” Velikof asked with cocked tongue and eye.

“With horse and buggy, of course.”

“Oh there, Comet,” Willy McGilly called. “Is it true that you travel out among the stars with horse and buggy?”

“Aye, that I do,” the long gray-bearded man named Comet called back, “with a horse named Pee-gosh and a buggy named Harma. It’s a flop-eared horse and a broken buggy, but they take me there.”

“Touch clay,” said Crayola Catfish, “for the lightning.”

They touched clay. Everything was of baked clay anyhow, even the dominos. And there had been lightning, fantastic lightning dashing itself through every crack and cranny of the flimsy hotel. It was a lightning brighter than all the catfish-oil lamps in the world put together. And it continued. There was clattering sequence thunder, and there was a roaring booming sound that came from a few miles west of the thunder.

The Giants came in and stood around the edges of the room. They were all very much alike, like brothers. They were tall and somber,

shabby, black-bearded to the eyes, and with black hats on their heads. Unkempt. All were about nine feet tall.

“Shall I sound like a simpleton if I ask if they are really giants?” Velikof questioned.

“As your eyes tell you, they are the giants,” Crayola said. “They stay here in the out-of-the-way places even more than the rest of us. Sometimes regular people see them and do not understand that they are regular people too. For that there is scandal. It was the scent of such a scandal, I believe, that brought the three of you here. But they are not apes or bears or monsters. They are people too.”

“They are of your own same kindred?” Velikof asked.

“Oh yes. They are the uncles, the old bachelors. That’s why they grow tall and silent. That’s why they stand around the edges of the room. And that is why they dig themselves caves into the banks and bluffs instead of living in huts. The roofs of huts are too low for them.”

“It would be possible to build taller huts,” Willy McGilly suggested.

“It would be possible for you, yes,” Crayola said. “It would not be possible for them. They are set in their ways. They develop a stoop and a gait because they feel themselves so tall. They let their hair grow and overflow, all over their faces and around their eyes, and all over their bodies also. They are the steers of the species. Having no children or furniture, what can they do but grow tall and ungainly like that? This happens also to the steers of cattle and bears and apes, that they grow tall and gangling. They become bashful, you see, so sometimes it is mistakenly believed that they are fierce.”

The roaring and booming from west of the thunder was becoming louder and nearer. The river was coming dangerously alive. All of the people in the room knew that it was now dark outside, and it was not yet time to be night.

The Comet gave his pool cue to one of the bashful giants and came and sat with the eminent.

“You are Magi?” he asked.

“I am a magus, yes,” Willy McGilly said. “We are called eminent scientists now-a-days. Velikof here also remains a magus, but Arpad has lost it all this day.”

“You are not the same three I first believed,” the old Comet said. “Those three passed me several of my cycles back. They had had word of

an Event, and they had come from a great distance as soon as they heard it. But it took them near two thousand years to make the trip and they were worried that myth had them as already arriving long ago. They were worried that false Magi had anticipated them and set up a preventing myth. And I believe that is what did happen.”

“And your own myths, old fellow, have they preceded you, or have you really been here before?” Willy McGilly asked. “I see that you have a twisty tongue that turns out some really winding myths.”

“Thank you, for that is ever my intent. Myths are not merely things that were made in times past: myths are among the things that maintain the present in being. I wish most strongly that the present should be maintained: I often live in it.”

Tell us, old man, why Boomer Flats is a place that the comets come back to?” Willy said.

“Oh, it’s just one of the post stations where we change horses when we make our orbits. A lot of the comets come to the Flats: Booger, Donati, Eneke, 1914c, and Halley.”

But why to Boomer Flats on the little Cimarron River?” Willy inquired.

Things are often more than they seem. The Cimarron isn’t really so little a river as you would imagine. Actually it is the river named Ocean that runs around all the worlds.”

“Old Comet, old man with the pieces falling off of you,” Dr. Velikof Vonk asked out of that big head of his, “can you tell us just who are the under-people that we have tracked all around the world and have probably found here no more than seventy miles from our own illustrious T-Town?”

“A phyz like you have on you, and you have to ask!” the old Comet twinkled at Velikof (a man who twinkled like that had indeed been among the stars; he had their dust on him). “You’re one of them, you know.”

“I’ve suspected that for a long time,” Velikof admitted. “But who are they? And who am I?”

“Wise Willy here said it correctly to you last night; that they were the scrubs who bottom the breed. But do not demean the scrubs: they are the foundation. They are human as all of us are human. They are a race that underlies the other several races of man. When the bones and blood of the more manifest races grow too thin, then they sustain you with the



mixture of their strong kingship: the mixing always goes on, but in special eras it is more widespread. They are the link that is never really missing, the link between the clay and the blood.”

“Why are they, and me if I were not well-kempt and eminent, sometimes taken to be animals?” Velikof asked. “Why do they always live in such outlandish places?”

“They don’t always. Sometimes they live in very inlandish places. Even wise Willy understands that. But it is their function to stand apart and grow in strength. Look at the strong bone structure of that girl there! It is their function to invent forms — look at the form her mother invented for her. They have a depth of mind, and they have it particularly in those ghostly areas where the other races lack it. And they share and mingle it in those sudden motley ages of great achievement and vigor. Consider the great ages of Athens, of Florence, of Los Angeles. And afterwards, this people will withdraw again to gather new strength and bottom.”

“And why are they centered here in a tumble-down hotel that is like a series of old daguerreotypes?” Willy McGilly asked. “Will you tell us that there is something cosmic about this little old hotel, as there is about this little old river?”

“Aye, of course there is, Willy. This is the hotel named Xenodocheion. This is the special center of these Xenoi, these strangers, and of all strangers everywhere. It isn’t small; it is merely that you can see but a portion of it at one time. And then they center here to keep out of the way. Sometimes they live in areas and neighborhoods that regularized humanity has abandoned (whether in inner-city or boondock). Sometimes they live in eras and decades that regularized humanity has abandoned: for their profundity of mind in the more ghostly areas, they have come to have a cavalier way with time. What is wrong with that? If regular people are finished with those days and times, why may not others use them?”

The roaring and booming to the west of the thunder had become very loud and very near now, and in the immediate outdoors there was heavy rain.

It is the time,” the girl Crayola Catfish cried out in her powerful and intricate voice. “The flash flood is upon us and it will smash everything. We will all go and lie down in the river.

They all began to follow her out, the Boomer Flats people, and the

Giants among them; the eminent, everybody.

“Will you also lie down in the river, Comet?” Willy McGilly asked. “Somehow I don’t believe it of you.”

“No, I will not. That isn’t my way. I will take my horse and buggy and ascend above it.”

“Ah, but Comet, will it look like a horse and buggy to us?”

“No, it will look quite other, if you do chance to see it.”

“And what are you really, Comet?” Velikof asked him as they left him. “What species do you belong to?”

“To the human species, of course, Velikof. I belong to still another race of it; another race that mixes sometimes, and then withdraws again to gather more strength and depth. Some individuals of us withdraw for quite long times. There are a number of races of us in the wide cousinship, you see and it is a necessity that we be strangers to each other for a good part of the time.”

“Are you a saucerian?”

“Oh saucerian be damned, Velikof! Harma means chariot or it means buggy; it does not mean saucer. We are the comets. And our own mingling with the commonalty of people has also had quite a bit to do with those sudden incandescent eras. Say, I’d like to talk with you fellows again some time. I’ll be by this way again in about eighty-seven years.

“Maybe so,” said Dr. Velikof Vonk.

“Maybe so,” said Willy McGilly.

The eminent followed the Boomer Flats people to the river. And the Comet, we suppose, took his horse and buggy and ascended out of it. Odd old fellow he was; pieces falling off him; he’d hardly last another hundred years.

The red and black river was in surging flood with a blood-colored crest bearing down. And the flats — they were just too flat. The flood would be a mile wide here in one minute and everywhere in that width it would be deep enough and swift enough to drown a man. It was near dark: it was near the limit of roaring sound. But there was a pile of large rocks there in the deepening shallows: plenty of rocks: at least one big heavy rock for every person.

The Boomer Flats people understood what the rocks were for, and the Giants among them understood. Two of the eminent understood; and one of them, Arpad, apparently did not. Arpad was carrying on in great

fear about the dangers of death by drowning.

Quickly then, to cram mud into the eyes and ears and noses and mouths. There is plenty of mud and all of it is good. Spirits of Catfish protect us now! — it will be only for a few hours, for two or three days at the most.

Arpad alone panicked. He broke and ran when Crayola Catfish tried to put mud in his mouth and nose to save him. He ran and stumbled in the rising waters to his death.

But all the others understood. They lay down in the red roaring river, and one of the giants set a heavy rock on the breast of every person of them to hold them down. The last of the giants then rolled the biggest of the rocks onto his own breast.

So all were safe on the bottom of the surging torrent, safe in the old mud-clay cradle. Nobody can stand against a surging flood like that: the only way is to lie down on the bottom and wait it out. And it was a refreshing, a deepening, a renewing experience. There are persons, both inside and outside the orders, who make religious retreats of three days every year for their renewal. This was very like such a retreat.

When the flood had subsided (this was three days later), they all rose again, rolling the big rocks off their breasts; they cleared their eyes and ears and mouths of the preserving mud, and they resumed their ways and days.

For Velikof Vonk and for Willy McGilly it had been an enriching experience. They had found the link that was not really lost, leaving the other ninety-nine meanwhile. They had grown in cousinship and wisdom. They said they would return to the flats every year at mud-duck season and turtle-egg season. They went back to T-Town enlarged and happy.

There is, however, a gap in the Magi set, due to the foolish dying of Arpad Arkabaranan. It is not of Scripture that a set of Magi should consist of only three. There have been sets of seven and nine and eleven. It is almost of Scripture, though, that a set should not consist of less than three. In the Masulla Apocalypse it seems to be said that a set must contain at the least a Comet, a Commoner, and a Catfish. The meaning of this is pretty muddy, and it may be a mistranslation.

There is Dr. Velikof Vonk with his huge head, with his heavy orbital ridges, with the protruding near-muzzle on him that makes the chin unnecessary and impossible, with the great hack-brain and the great good

humor. He is (and you had already guessed it of him) an ABSM, a neo-Neanderthal, an unmissing link, one of that branch of the human race that lives closest to the clay and the catfish.

There is Willy McGilly who belongs (and he himself has come to the realization of this quite lately) to that race of mankind called the Comets. He is quite bright, and he has his periods. He himself is a short orbit comet, but for all that he has been among the stars. Pieces fall off of him; he leaves a wake; but he'll last a while yet.

One more is needed so that this set of Magi may be formed again. The other two aspects being already covered, the third member could well be a regularized person. It could be an older person of ability, an eminent. It would be a younger person of ability, a pre-eminent.

This person may be you. Put your hand to it if you have the surety about you, if you are not afraid of green snakes in the cup (they'll fang the face off you if you're afraid of them), or of clay-mud, or of comet dust, or of the rollicking world between.

## WORLD ABOUNDING

How many habitable worlds there are depends on the meaning given to 'habitable' and to 'world.' Habitable without special equipment and conditioning is the usual restriction on the first. 'Of no mean size' and 'of no no extreme distance' are two common conditions of the second. Thus Roulettenwelt and Kentron-Kosmon are really asteroids, too small to be worlds. But how about Hokey Planet and such? And how about the distant traveler's-tale worlds?

Butler lists only seventeen habitable worlds, limiting them to the fair-sized and generally hospitable worlds of Sol and of the Centauri Suns. So all these were closely grouped. The early notion that double or triple suns would not have planets because of their irregularity had been an erroneous estimate, fortunately.

Thus, revolving around Sol there is only Gaea (Earth). Around the Sun Proxima (the Grian Sun) are Kentauron-Mikron, Camiroi, Astrobe, and Dahae. Around the Sun Alpha are Skandia, Pudibundia, Analos, and the equivalently-named twins with such different superior fauna, Proavitus and Paravata; and Skokumchuck (the Shelni Planet). Around the sun Beta are the three trader planets, Emporion, Apateon, and Klepsis; tricky places, it is said. But if you think the Traders are tricky, how about the other three Beta Planets? There are Aphthonia (also called World Abounding), Bellota (Butler lists this as a Planet, though there are larger bodies listed as asteroids: he says, however, that Bellota in its present creation is much larger than its size of record, a puzzling statement), and Aranea (or the Spider Planet).

These latter three are habitable by all definition, but they are generally uninhabited, each for its own unclear reason. It was to clear up the reason and impediment concerning Aphthonia or World Abounding that a party was now in descending hover.

"We are on this mission because of one phrase, repeated by leaders of five different parties, and maintained in the face of vigorous courts martial," Fairbridge Exendine, the singling leader, said with a sort of hooked wonder. "I have never been able to get that phrase out of my mind. 'You'd never believe it' was the phrase, and the men of the five parties, of the more than twenty parties in fact, would not elaborate on it much."

“I hardly believe it either,” Judy Brindlesby said, and I haven’t been there yet. It almost jumps at you. There is certainly no other world that presents so pleasant an appearance from medium hover. The continent named Aegea and the howling beauty of those oceans and seas that invade it so deeply! The river named Festinatio, the largest clear river on any world! The volcano named Misericors! Why should a river be named ‘I hurry’ and a volcano be named the ‘merciful’?”

“It was John Chancel who named them,” Rushmore Planda said with that curious reverence which all use in speaking of the great explorer. “And it was he who first said that this was the finest world ever, and that it should be left alone to be just that.”

World Abounding has been visited by the great John Chancel just fifty years before. He had been the first Gaea man on very many of the worlds. It was John Chancel who said that only men should go to work on World Abounding, that it was no place to raise a family.

Later he repented even of this and said that nobody at all should go there.

Chancel had stated that World Abounding was the most generous and fertile world ever, and that its very generosity would blow one’s mind. It was his opinion that this was the Hasty Planet of the earliest travelers’ tales, and that there was something very much too hasty about it. And he said that the most famous product of World Abounding should never be used at more than one-thousandth strength.

Gorgos, the magic animal and plant hormone (it wasn’t that, but such was the popular explanation of it), came from World Abounding. Cut it a thousand times and it still was the magic growth-trigger. Ah, why cut it at all though? Why not take it at the full where it abounded in its fullness? To be spooked off by too much of a good thing was childish. “Let us examine it as scientists and adults,” Fairbridge said as they came into lower hover, “as balanced persons who know what we are about.”

The seven balanced persons who knew what they were about were Fairbridge Exendine, the canny commander; the Brindlesbys, Judy and Hilary; the Plandas, Erma and Rushmore; the Kerwins, Lisetta and Blase. They were three couples and one remarkable singling, a superior microcosm.

They came down easily and safely from low hover as twenty-two parties had come down before (twenty-three if one counts the solo voyage

of John Chancel). They were pleasantly staggered by the sudden green power of that place. There was no need of any caution: Nobody of any party had ever suffered even slight injury or sickness on World Abounding. They found such generosity as would gladden any mind and body. It would be difficult, initially, to be scientists and adult about World Abounding.

Well, revel in the joy then. Afterwards, analyze it all minutely, but without losing any of that joyousness. Do not complain too strenuously about a stacked deck if it is all stacked in your favor.

They were on the Terraces — “which aren’t mentioned by John Chancel at all,” Erma Planda said with a toss of her whole golden body, “and it is only gradually that members of the other parties begin to mention them. Could the Terraces have grown up in fifty standard years?”

The Terraces formed a great elongated, stepped plateau, overcome with its own lushness. From the great green broad height of the hovercraft landing, the Terraces tumbled down seventy meters in more than twenty giant steps to the plain. This was all between the volcano and the river, and the Terraces had shoved out into the river to produce gracious rapids with their musical foam.

“Yes, the Terraces have apparently grown in fifty years, or have been spewed out by the volcano named Merciful,” Fairbridge said. “Chancel described the plain between the volcano and the river and he didn’t mention the Terraces at all. He set up a spire for monument in the middle of the plain, and where is it now? I believe that it is engulfed in the Terraces, and I intend to find it. I also intend to find why some of the latter parties refer to the Terraces as the Graves. No member of any party died here. All returned. I have a sudden exuberance come over me and I’ll start my digging now.”

And Fairbridge Exendine had already set the earth-augers to cutting down into the Terraces.

“I have my own new exuberance,” Judy Brindlesby shouted like a whole covey of trumpets. “Hilary, my clay-headed hero, we will make luscious life together all day and all night.”

Judy was large, but surpassingly shapely and graceful, like a hovercraft. Her brindled black-red hair was so weighty and enveloping that a lesser woman could hardly have carried it; and it seemed to be growing

by the minute, like the grass there. One couldn't actually quite see the World Abounding grass grow, but one could hear it; it made a pleasant squeaking sound. And there was a hint of quick music about Judy's heavy hair that indicated that it was growing and growing.

"Yes, it is volcanic ash," Rushmore Planda was saying as he joined Fairbridge at the earth-augers. "It is quite airy ash." The volcanic ash was chalky white to pearl gray. Then it had a streak of green in it, and another.

"You are through the first stratum, Fairbridge," Rushmore said, "and into a layer of compressed vegetation that hasn't even rotted yet. This is the vegetation that was recently the top of the second stratum; very recently, I believe. This is a curious pile of Terraces."

"Oh, it's a holy pyramid," Erma Planda told them all, "and the Volcano built it especially for the holy people, ourselves. John Chancel said that he always felt himself to be a holy man when he first set foot on a good new world. I feel myself to be a holy woman now."

"Do not stuff yourself, holy woman," her man Rushmore told her. "Chancel preached temperance in all things. Do you have to eat everything you see? Do you have to eat all of everything you see?"

"Yes, I have to, I have to! And was it not the great John Chancel, he who first warned against this place, who said that there was no possibility of poisoning on World Abounding? Oh, and he said that there was no possibility of over-indulgence here either. He stated that the essence Gorgos has no limits, but that it pretends that it has. Everything that can be chewed or swallowed here is safe to eat or drink. There is no insect or animal that bites, nor worm that gnaws, nor moth that harms. There'll be no extreme heat or cold. The nineteen-day polar tumble combined with the diurnal rotation keeps the air breezy and invigorating. Invigorating, yes, yes, extremely so. More than invigorating. It's a pretty horny world, actually. Rather a rambunctious feeling it gives one. More than that, it —"

"What has happened to all you girl-folk?" the leader Fairbridge asked, rather puzzled and almost alarmed. "I have never seen you so wild-eyed and charged."

"Poor Fairbridge," Judy Brindlesby needled him. "Never mind, Fairbridge, I'll get you a girl. I'll get you one within a standard month. I promise you."

"Impossible, sweet Judy, unless you slay your own mate. We're to be



here for a long year, or until we solve the problem, and nobody else will touch down. Where would you get me a girl?”

“That I don’t know. But the very rocks are singing to me, ‘You’ll get a girl, Judy, you’ll get a girl for old Fairbridge within a month.’”

“Gorgos is not merely a magic animal-and-plant hormone,” Rushmore Planda was speaking with a suddenly improved, new and magnificent voice. “It’s a way of life, I see that now. It will impose its own shape on my wife, however much she stuffs herself. It will impose its shape on everything. It is a new pace and a new sort of life.”

“It may be that its pace is too fast,” Fairbridge warned.

“Makes no difference. There can’t be any other pace here. Get the song of those romping birds there! It’s the same beat that Gaea lunatics, treated with Gorgos, begin to sing with as soon as their sure cure begins. Get the whole stimulating, pleasant, almost drunken smell of this planet! Here is not so much the uncanny feel of things seen before, but of things smelled before. All great smells (Can one speak of great smells? Yes, one can.) have a reminiscent element, but with this it is reminiscent of a future. There is a pleasurable mustiness here, that’s sure, but it isn’t of past time: it’s of future time, long waiting, and now beginning to unfold suddenly.”

“You men are drunk on only the expectation of wine,” Lisetta Kerwin said. “But the one thing I remember from the journal of the great John Chancel was the recipe for making morning wine in nine minutes on World Abounding. And I’ve already started it. Time’s arunning.”

Lisetta was crushing purple fruit into a huge calathus or basket made by pulling the inner corolla out of a giant flower bloom.

“It would be chemically possible to make a potable fruit alcohol in nine minutes,” Blase Kerwin said, “but it wouldn’t be wine. It wouldn’t have the bouquet. It wouldn’t have the — but it has it. I smell that it has already, and it grows. Here, here, let me swig that —”

“No, no, it isn’t ready,” Lisetta protested. “It still moves itself, it lends its color to the cup, it bites like a serpent.”

“Look out, serpent and wife, I’ll bite back. Have at you.” And Blase Kerwin took a huge draught from the green cup. He turned a bit green himself, but cheerfully so. He lost his voice, and he did a little dance on one foot while he grasped his throat with both hands, but he was quite pleased about it all. There are some things too good to wait for.

“A little patience,” Lisetta said. “Four minutes yet.”

Blase still hadn't his speech back but he could howl his high pleasure over the breathtaking encounter. And soon, quite soon, they were all lousy over the singing, heady stuff. It was very difficult to be scientific and adult about World Abounding.

So they probed the world very unscientifically and kiddishly, except Fairbridge and Rushmore, who still probed the levels of the Terraces. The three ladies especially were happy maniacs and they were all over that abundant land. They caught and rode huge gangling animals. After all, on the word of Chancel and others, everything was harmless. They wrestled with big starfish in the river named Festinatio. They ate the snap-off tails of huge lizards and sent them away bawling and running on their two hind legs. Never mind; the big lizards could regrow their snap-off tails.

“Those five party leaders who wrote ‘You'd never believe it,’ do you think they were laughing when they wrote it?” Judy Brindlesby exploded the question when she clambered once again back up to the diggings.

“One of them, I believe, wrote in laughter, Judy,” Fairbridge said. “And one of them, I know for certain, wrote in absolute horror. I don't know about the other three.”

“Fairbridge, I suggest that we clear out a square about five meters on a side and excavate the whole top level of it,” Rushmore Planda said. “I believe that there is more mystery buried here than we have met in all our lives.”

“All right, we will do that,” Fairbridge agreed. “The least we can do is see what is right under our feet.”

“But not there!” Judy trumpeted at them. “Dig here where the people are.”

“What people, Judy?” Fairbridge asked her patiently. “All the people who have ever been on this world have been accounted for.”

“Not till we account for them they haven't been. How do I know what people they are till you dig them up? Dig carefully, though. They are real people here. You call yourselves diggers and you don't even know where the people are buried.”

“We dig where you say, Judy. You are a people-witcher in your several ways.”

“But don't dig all the time. You're missing it. Life is being lived today and tonight.” And she was off again, leaping down the three-meter steps

of the Terraces.

“I don’t know what she means,” Fairbridge said as he set the excavators to work and then adjusted them to ‘Slow and Careful.’ “I hardly ever know what she means.”

“I believe that I know what she means, Fairbridge,” Rushmore said in an eerie voice with a scarce human chuckle in it.

So the excavators excavated, moving the light volcanic ash that was below the vegetation. There was real mystery in the ash that was turned up. That stuff was not completely dead.

“One thing I like about it here is the size of the party,” Fairbridge mumbled as he sensed something near and put the excavators on ‘Very Slow.’ “Seven. That’s right, that’s just right. That’s just how many persons should be on a world. More than that is a crowd. But a man cannot live pleasantly alone. What do you think about that, Rushmore? Isn’t seven about right? Rushmore?”

“He’s gone. The party isn’t seven now. It’s one, me. I’m alone. I suspect that they have chosen the better part, though. Yes, I know what Judy meant, and it does come in very strongly here. But it isn’t just with them; it’s coming up from the very ground here. I’ll dig on.”

Fairbridge dug down till he came to the people.

It was night. Ancilla, the smaller moon, was overhead; Matrona, the larger moon, had just arisen. Fairbridge went to find the three couples of the party.

“They all have the new exuberance on them and they make luscious life together all day and all night. But I have to tell them what I have found.”

It would be easiest to find Judy Brindlesby, the liveliest of them all. Wherever she was, any man would know it by special sensing. Fairbridge’s special sensing led him to a river meadow and into a high brake of reeds that still squeaked from sudden new growth. Judy lay there with her clay-headed hero and husband Hilary.

It was magnificent Judy stretched on her back in giggling slumber. Hilary, chuckling with pleasure, lay atop her and was cutting her hair with great shears: cutting her incredible hair, cutting her superabundant hair, cutting the mountains of her hair. He had sheared off great heaps of it, possibly twenty kilograms of it, and she still had more than she’d had that afternoon.

“You are almost completely hidden in the reeds, Hilary,” Fairbridge said then. “I’d never have found you, except that any man can sense Judy’s presence.”

“Hullo, Fairbridge,” Hillary grunted pleasantly. “The reeds weren’t here when we lay down. They’ve grown up since. Everything that touche~ her grows, and she is enlivened wherever she touches this ground. Look at her hair, Fairbridge. She’s in accord with it here. Gorgos or whatever the growth element is, she’s with it. So am I.”

“I dug down to people in the Terraces, Hilary.”

“Yes. Judy said there would be people there.”

Fairbridge and Hilary went and took Rushmore from the sleeping arms of Erma in the blue-stem hills. And they met Lisetta and Blase Kerwin coming out of the orchards.

“Lisetta says that you have dug down to people,” Blase cried vividly. “Oh, for the love of abundant Aphthonia, let’s go see what this is about!”

“I’ve dug down to people, yes,” Fairbridge said, “but how could Lisetta know it?”

They climbed up the tall Terraces and came to the open shaft.

“We will remove the rest of the volcanic dust and crust from about them,” Fairbridge said. “And when old Beta Sun comes up, we can get a good look at them.”

“Oh, this is fine enough light for it,” Lisetta said. “Aren’t they nice people, though. So friendly. We will get acquainted with them before the brighter light is on them. It’s best to become acquainted with good people in dim light first, especially when they’ve been through an odd experience. Then they’ll brighten up with the light.”

There were twelve of the people there, twelve adults. They were seated, apparently, on stone benches around a stone table. The details would be known when the rest of the volcanic dust had been cleared away and when Beta sun was risen. The twelve were got up in a gala and festive way. They had sat eating and drinking when it came over them, but they had not been taken by surprise. It was a selective volcanic thrust that had covered them. It came only onto the Terraces that had become a shoulder of the volcano. The people needn’t have been there; and they needn’t have sat and waited while it covered them. The surrounding plains hadn’t been covered by the volcanic thrust.

“Why, they’re pleasantly dead, and not at all decayed,” Lisetta cried.

“They are really such nice people. Don’t they seem so to the rest of you? There is something almost familiar about a few of them - as if I had met them before.”

“How long?” Fairbridge asked Hilary Brindlesby.

“Two years, maybe. They haven’t been dead longer than that.”

“You’re crazy, Hilary. You are the tissue man of this party. Take tissue samples.”

“I will, of course. But they’ve been dead for about two years.”

“Then they were alive here when the Whiteoak party was here.”

“Likely.”

“They why didn’t Commander Harry Whiteoak mention them?”

“Whiteoak was one of those, Fairbridge, who used the phrase ‘You’d never believe it,’” Rushmore Planda cut in. “Maybe he figured that covered it all.”

“But who are they?” Fairbridge persisted. “Every person of every expedition has been accounted for. These are our own sort of people, but they aren’t people of the Whiteoak party. I’ve met all the Whiteoaks, and all came back.”

“Aren’t they of the Whiteoak party, Fairbridge?” Blase asked with an air of discovery. “You’d better pray that the light doesn’t get any better, man. You’re near spooked now. There’s a couple of ghosts there: an ear, a brow, a jaw slope. And that lady there, isn’t she a little like another lady we met, enough like her to be a sister or daughter? I tell you that there are strong resemblances to several of the Whiteoak people here.”

“You’re crazy. The Whiteoaks were here for only six standard months. If they met these mysterious people, why didn’t they give an account of it?”

They didn’t do much more with it till daylight. They moved some of the volcanic filler and uncovered to a little more depth.

“Can you prop under this level and leave these people here, and then excavate the layer under them?” Lisetta Kerwin asked.

“We can, but why?” Fairbridge inquired. Fairbridge was jumpy. He didn’t seem to appreciate how nice it was to come onto such a nice group of people.

“Oh, I think that these people picked a spot that had been picked time and time again before them.”

Along about daylight, Judy Brindlesby and Erma Planda, with a

variety of noises, came up to the other on the Terraces.

“Folks, are we ever sick!” Judy sounded out. “I’m sicker than Erma, though. I go further into things than she does. Don’t you wish you were sick the way we are, Lisetta?”

“But I am, I am,” Lisetta said, “and it didn’t take me all night to find it out. It’s fun, isn’t it?”

“Sure it is. I never had so much fun being sick in my life.” And Judy retched funfully.

It was a little unusual that all three ladies should show the first signs of pregnancy at the same time. It was odd that they should all have morning sickness. Oddest of all was their being so delighted with their sickness. There was something about World Abounding that seemed to make all experience, even nausea, a happy experience.

And the dead people in the Terraces — “They are the happiest-looking dead people I ever did see,” Erma Planda declared. “I will have to know what they are so happy about. They would tell me if I had the proper ears to listen. It’s hard to hear when it comes to you that way. What, dear? What are you saying?”

“I wasn’t saying anything, Erma,” Rushmore told her.

“Wasn’t talking to you, Rushmore,” Erma said with a flick of her golden body. “What, dear? I can’t quite make it out.” And Erma Planda thumped her body as if to get better reception.

“Your ears aren’t in your belly, Erma,” Rushmore reminded her.

“Oh well, maybe some of them are. No, I just get it a little at a time what they are so happy about.”

The happy dead people had been preserved by the volcanic fill, and perhaps by the essence Gorgos or some other substance of World Abounding. They didn’t feel dead. They were rather waxy to the touch; they were about as warm as the air, and they hadn’t any clamminess; there was even a slight resiliency to them which is usually a property of live flesh and not of dead flesh. They were clad in the light native garments of World Abounding. They were, in some manner hard to reconcile, kindred to the members of the Whiteoak expedition. They were beautiful and mysterious people, but they didn’t mean to be mysterious. They’d have told you anything you wanted to know if only proper accord might be established between dead tongue and live ear.

But was there not something a little bit too glib about the impressions

that all these new explorers received from the dead folks? Yes, a little too glib here and there, but how could anyone be blamed for that?

“Just a minute? nevertheless,” Lisetta Kerwin was saying both to the dead people and to the live. “We all say, or we all think, that you, our good friends here, are clad in the light native garments of World Abounding. Our good commander, Fairbridge, in fact, has just scribbled those very words in his notebook. But how did we know what the light native garments of World Abounding should look like since we never saw any of them before? And since there has never been, for the record, any human native on World Abounding, never been any human being born here, hasn’t this all a fishy smell? Or has it? For I recall now that the fish of World Abounding have a pleasant fruity smell. Well, take your time, folks. Being dead, you are in no hurry, and I am not; but tell us about it when you get to it.”

They sank a second shaft beside the first. They ran reinforcing timbers under the place of the pleasant dead people so that they would not be disturbed or collapsed. Then they dug the second shaft down through the volcanic fill to the next level of vegetation. There was an unexpected thing: it had been dug before. They were excavating an old excavation.

They cleared the space below the dead people (and it showed every sign of having been cleared before); they came, as they had weirdly known that they must come to such, to another clutch of dead people. They had been expecting just that, but they were stunned by it even more than by the first discovery or first report.

“How many times, do you think?” Fairbridge asked them all in real wonder.

“I guess twenty-two times,” Hilary squinted. “There are, in all, twenty-two levels to the Terraces.”

“Would a colossal joker, a demonical joker, a supernal joker, a godly joker, even an ungodly joker pull the same joke twenty-two times in a row? Wouldn’t it begin to pall even on him after twenty-two times of it?”

“Not a bit of it,” Erma said. “Whoever he is, he still thinks thunder is funny, and he’s pulled the thunder joke billions and billions of times. And he laughs every time. Listen for the giggle sometimes; it comes around the edge of every thunder.”

Slight differences only this time. The dead people of the second level numbered eleven adults. They had been dead a little longer than the first,

but they hadn't been dead for more than four or five years. They were as well-preserved and as happy-seeming as the upper gentry. They added a bit to the mystery.

Fairbridge and his folks and his excavators continued to excavate, about one level a day. All the shafts that they dug now had already been dug out several times before. At the fifth level down they came to the tip of the spire or steeple that John Chancel had built as monument on the plain between the volcano and the river. They knew that it was older than the Terraces, that it went all the way down to the flat land; they also knew that it was only fifty years old.

There were sixteen of the gracious and pleasantly dead people on this level. They had made a circular stone table around the tip of the spire where it came through the lower Terrace. They had wined and dined themselves there while they waited for the volcano named Merciful to cover them up. But who were these people, so beautiful and so pleasant and so dead, arranged on levels several years apart?

"The mystery gets deeper all the time," Fairbridge said weightily.

"Yes, it gets about three meters deeper every day," Hilary grinned. "Anybody got any strange stories to add to this?"

"Yes, I've a strange one," Judy told them. "I know that it seems pretty short notice, and I had no idea that it could be so far along, and I'm sure that it's completely impossible, but my time is upon me right now."

They all gaped at her.

"I said Right Now, Hilary," Judy told her husband in an almost tight voice, "and I mean right now."

Well, Judy was large (though shapely and graceful as a hover-craft), and the issue would apparently be quite small. But all of them had scientific eyes, trained to notice things large and small, and none of them had noticed that it would be so soon with Judy.

There was no trouble, of course. Hilary himself was a doctor. So was Blase. So, come to think of it, was Lisetta Kerwin. But Lisetta herself was feeling a bit imminent.

No trouble, though. On World Abounding everything happens easily and pleasantly and naturally. Judy Brindlesby, easily and pleasantly, gave birth to a very small girl.

Well, it was less ugly than most babies, less a red lump and more of a formed thing. And quite small. There was a spate of words from all of



them, but no words could convey the unusual formliness of the very little girl.

“She is really pretty, and I never thought I’d say that about a baby, even my own,” Hilary bleated proudly. “She is so small and so perfect. She is the least lass I ever saw.”

“She is wonderful, she is beautiful, there has never been anyone like her,” Judy was chanting in ecstasy, “She is perfect, she shines like a star, she sparkles like an ocean, she is the most enchanting ever, she is —”

“Oh, cool it, mother, cool it,” the Least Lass said.

2

Fairbridge Exendine reacted in absolute horror to this, and he remained in a state of horrified rejection. The others, however, accepted it pretty gracefully. Explanations were called for, of course. Well then, let us seek the explanations.

“There has to be an answer to the Case of the Precocious Little Girl,” Rushmore said. “Does anyone have an answer?”

“She’s yours, Judy,” Erma said. “You tell us if we heard what we thought we heard.”

“Oh, I thought she talked quite plain enough, and I’m sure you heard what she said. But why should you ask me about it when she is right here? How did you learn to talk, dear?” Judy asked her little daughter, the Least Lass.

“Five days in the belly of a chatterbox and I shouldn’t have learned talk?” the Least Lass asked with fine irony for one so young. So the explanation was simple enough: the little girl had learned to talk from her mother.

But Fairbridge Exendine was still gray-faced with horror. And she didn’t belong to that singling at all. Why should he be so affected by this?

“Do you know that you are the first human child ever born on World Abounding?” Judy asked her child a little later.

“Oh, mother, I’m sure you’re mistaken,” Least Lass said. “I was under the impression that I was the two hundred and first.”

“Can you walk?” Blase Kerwin asked the little girl a little later yet.

“Oh, I doubt it very much,” she said. “It will be a standard hour before I even attempt it. It may be a standard day before I do it perfectly.”

But Fairbridge Exendine had gone back to his digging now. He was in new horror of the mystery of the excavations, but he was still more in

horror of the little girl.

Yet she was the prettiest child that anyone had ever seen — so far.

“Anything that we do is always anticlimactic to whatever Judy does,” Erma Planda said with mock complaint. Erma, with her golden body and her greater beauty, wasn’t really jealous of Judy Brindlesby. Neither was Lisetta Kerwin, with her finer features and her quicker intelligence. Both knew that Judy would always anticipate them in everything. She had certainly done it in this, though by no more than a couple of hours.

“Well, it’s surely a puzzle,” Rushmore Planda was talking pleasantly that day or the next. “We are all human persons. And the gestation period for humans is more than five days.”

“Don’t — don’t talk about it,” Fairbridge stuttered. “Dig — dig, man.”

“Of course it’s possible that the three conceptions took place nine months ago. That’s the logical thing to believe, but a little illogic bug keeps croaking to me ‘You know better than that.’ And all three of the children say that they were in the bellies for only five days. There was certainly an extraordinary enlivening in all of us that first night here, except in you, Fairbridge.”

“Don’t — damn — talk about it. Dig — damn — dig.”

“This is a miracle world, of course, and it is full of miracle substances. Nevertheless, I believe that the Miracle Master is a little grotesque in this trick. I love my own small son beyond telling, yet I feel that there is something in him that is not of myself and is not of Erma. Part of his parentage is World Abounding.”

“Don’t — don’t talk crazy. None — none of this has happened. Dig — dig, man.”

There was never a more frightened, more nervous man than Fairbridge. He buried himself in the digging work to get away from it; he’d buried himself nearly forty-five meters deep in the excavating work by this time. Oh, that man was edgy!

“I imagine that the same thing happens on Gaea,” Rushmore was rambling on. “We were, for most of the centuries, so close to it that we couldn’t see that the planet was the third parent in every conception. We saw it only a little when we came to Camiroi and Dahae and Analos: a twenty-day shorter gestation period in the one case, a twelve-day longer one in another. We were a long time guessing that there is no such thing as biology without environment. But who could have guessed that World

Abounding would be so extreme?”

“Don’t — don’t talk about it,” Fairbridge begged. “Thirty days, dam — dammit, and four — fourteen of them gone already. Dig, dig.”

“What thirty days, Fairbridge? Is there a thirty-day period mentioned of our expedition? I don’t know of it. Fairbridge, man, you only dig because you’re afraid to wonder. Whoever saw children grow so much in nine days? But then there are trees here that grow twenty meters high in one day. And look at the way the hair grows on Judy Brindlesby, and she a human! Not that the children aren’t human, not that they aren’t even two-thirds earth-human.

“Fairbridge, those are the three smartest children that anybody ever saw. When I was their age (oh, damn, I don’t mean nine days old, I mean their apparent age of nine or ten years old), when I was their age I wasn’t anything like as sharp as they are, and I was rated smart. And who ever saw such handsome people anywhere? They’re on a par with the dead people here in the Terraces. Do you believe that they’re of the same genesis?”

“D-dig, man, or drop dead, but don’t — don’t talk about it. It isn’t there. It hasn’t happened.”

“Erma thinks that the children have rapport with the dead people here in the Terraces. After all, they are one-third blood kindred. They all have one common parent, World Abounding. Erma also thinks that all three children are coming to their puberty period now. She believes that the pubescent manifestations here will be much stronger, much more purposive, much more communal than anything on Gaea or Camiroi or Dahae. The useless and vestigial poltergeistic manifestations of Gaea-Earth will not compare with them at all, she believes. Was there ever such frustrating failure in communicating as the whole poltergeist business?”

“Erma believes that the manifestations here will go even beyond the three-angel paradoxes of the pubescents on Kentauron-Mikron. And why should these things not go beyond? We had premonitions of such wonderful weirdnesses even on our own world. My mate Erma believes that these puberty insights (the volcano is a part and person of these insights) will begin very soon. Two more days; three at the most.”

“D-dig, man. Don’t — don’t think.”

Coming of age on World Abounding is a closed subject. It is not closed in the sense of being all secret or restricted, but in being a thing closed

upon itself. From its very beginning it is conscious of its resolution.

Least Lass Brindlesby, Heros Planda, and Kora Kerwin were paradoxical children. It seems foolish to speak of relaxed intensity, of foolish sagacity, of placid hysteria, of happy morbidity, of lively death-desire. The children had all these qualities and others just as contradictory. They were at all times in close wordless communication with their parents and with all other persons present, and they were at the same time total aliens. The children were puzzling, but they themselves certainly weren't puzzled: they were always quite clear as to their own aims and activities. They had no more doubt of their direction than the arc of a circle has.

Lisetta Kerwin worried a little that she might have a retarded daughter. It was not that the girl was slow about things, just that she was different about things. Should a nineteen-day-old girl be called retarded because she dislikes reading? Kora could read, most of the time. Whenever her intuitions cocked their ears with a little interest she could go right to the heart of any text. But mostly all three of the children disliked the reading business.

Hilary Brindlesby scolded the children because they showed no sign of the scientific approach or method. But the scientific approach with its systematic study would not have brought them along nearly as fast as they did go. They all had the intuitive approach and it brought them rapidly to a great body of knowledge.

The children were well acquainted with the dead people in the Terraces (Fairbridge, in his horror-filled distracting work, had excavated almost all the Terrace levels now). The children named the names of all the dead people and told of their intricate relationships. Lisetta Kerwin recorded all this from the children. It tied in remarkably with the surnames of the people of the various expeditions.

"You can't really communicate with the dead people of the Terraces," Blase Kerwin told his daughter Kora. "It is just a bit of flamboyant imagination that you all seem to have."

"Oh, they say pretty much the same thing about you and us, father," Kora said. "They tell us that we can't really communicate with such stuffy folks as you who weren't even born on World Abounding. We do communicate with you, though; a little bit, sometimes."

And then one evening, Heros Planda and Kora Kerwin said that they

were married.

“Isn’t twenty-two days old a little young to marry?” Rushmore Planda asked his son.

“No, I don’t believe so, father,” Heros said. “It is the regular age on World Abounding.”

“Who married you?” Lisetta Kerwin asked. After all, it had to be somebody who had done it, and there were no human persons on the world except those of the party.

“We don’t know his name,” Kora said. “We call him Marrying Sam in fun, but lots of the Terrace people have called him that too. We might suppose that that is his name now.”

“He isn’t a human person? Then what species does he belong to?”

“He doesn’t belong to any species, mother, since he is the only one of his kind. The Volcano says that Marrying Sam is his — the Volcano’s — dog. He doesn’t look like a dog, as I intuit dogs, though. He can’t very well look like anything else, since he is the only one of his kind.”

“I see,” Lisetta Kerwin said, but she saw it a little cockeyed. She was vaguely disappointed. She had always wanted a grand wedding for her daughter, if she had ever had a daughter. And now the daughter and the wedding had come so close together that something seemed lacking. She didn’t know that it had been a very grand wedding, with elementals such as a Volcano and an Ocean participating; she didn’t even know that she had participated, along with everything else on World Abounding.

“I thought you would be pleased, mother, that we had married and regularized our relationship,” Kora suggested hopefully.

“Of course I’m pleased. It’s just that you seem so young.”

Actually, the wedding celebration was not yet completed. Part of it was tangled with an event that involved almost all of them that night. It was similar to the mysterious carnal happenings of the first night of the party on World Abounding.

It was another of those extraordinary enlivening events. It got them. It got Erma Planda of the golden body, and Judy Brindlesby of the sometime incredible hair. It got Lisetta Kerwin of the now shattered serenity; it got Rushmore and Hilary and Blase.

Perhaps it had been thought that connubial passion happened without regard to place or planet. Such is not the case. And the case on World Abounding was very different from the case on Gaea or Camiroi or Dahae.

There was a pleasantness at all times on World Abounding, there was a constant passion of a sort, an almost pantheistic communion of all things together. But there was something else that came on much stronger at special times, that was triggered by special events without an exact time arriving, that was wild and rampant and blood- and seed-pungent.

It was the rutting reason.

Ah, we deck it out better than that. It was a night, or a day and a night, of powerful interior poetry and music, of personal affirmation, of physical and moral and psychic overflowing, of aesthetic burgeoning. It was clear crystal passion.

But let us not deck it out so nice that we won't know it. It was the horniest business ever, and it went on all night and all day and all night.

Hilary and Judy Brindlesby: he had the length and the strength; she had the fullness and the abundance. They made such laughing love that it sounded like chuckling thunder in the reed-brakes. Even the birds and the coney took up the cadence of it.

Rushmore and Erma Planda: he of the buffalo bulk and the impression of swooping Moses-horns on his head; she of the golden body and the emerald eyes. "They should take the two of us for models," Erma had said on that memorable time twenty-seven nights before. "Nobody has ever done it as we have. We should give lessons."

And then Blase and Lisetta Kerwin — no one will ever know just how it was with them. They had a thing that was too good to share (except in the planet-sharing aspect of it), that was too good to tell about, that was too good even to hint at. But, after such pleasures, they seemed the most pleased of all the couples.

But Kora and Heros were at home in this. World Abounding was really a third flesh of their union in a way that it couldn't be for the others. They held their own pleasures atop the volcanic Terraces, not in the reeds or the blue-stem hills or the orchards as the World-Gaea couples did.

World Abounding is the most passionate of worlds, with the possible exception of Kleptis of the Trader Planets where the rapacity in all things is so towering. The Miracle-Maker of legend and fact on World Abounding was always shocked and bewildered by such coming together as that of Heros and Kora, even though it was a licit relationship and done in the licit manner. It was the depth and violence of it that was

beyond law, that almost made the Miracle-Maker doubt that he had made such an indomitable thing as this.

Really, it was the Abounding Time, the name-thing of the world.

The only discordant (ill-fitting, but not completely unpleasant) elements in the thunderous season-time of World Abounding were Fairbridge Exendine and Least Lass Brindlesby.

“Now I am an old maid out of joint with the time,” Least Lass said as she wandered on the hills of her home. Both the smaller moon Ancilla and the larger moon Matrona were a-shine. “My proper mate is unready and unbelieving. My third parent, World Abounding, who is also the third lover of our love, is not sufficiently penetrating. Father of Planets, help us! You gave us here the special instruction ‘What you do, do quickly,’ yet it isn’t with us as with other places. Answer me, answer me right now!”

Least Lass threw angry rocks at the sky when she was not answered right now. But there is no time for slow answers on World Abounding.

And Fairbridge (still in the horror that would never leave him, but now touched by something both brighter and deeper) could only bark harshly to himself, “I am a human man. These things cannot be, have not been, must not be allowed to be. They are all hallucination, and this is an hallucinatory world. The monster-child remains monstrous, breathtakingly monstrous. It would be the only love I had ever had, if it could have been, if the cause of it were real. How could a human man mate with an imagination, how with a monster, be she a demon or an angel?”

It did not come to these two incongruities, in proper season, as it came to the other persons there.

By second morning, the partaking couples were in a state of dazzling exhaustion. But they knew that they were well fruited, fruited forever. Then there came the several days of golden desuetude. Even the letdowns on World Abounding were wonderful.

All the folks sympathized, of course, with the passion-impounded Fairbridge and with the lost-in-a-maze Least Lass. The case of Fairbridge and Least Lass was comical with the sort of cloud-high comedy that is found on World Abounding. There was everything ludicrous about it. There was a poignancy and a real agony about it also, but the betting was that these qualities would give way. You drive the sharp poignancy staff into the ground of World Abounding and it will grow green leaves on it

before you can blink; yes, and grotesque blooms like monkey faces. But it won't lose any of its sharpness when it blooms.

Fairbridge Exendine was a rough-featured man, in no way handsome. He missed being clumsy only by the overriding power of his movements. He had always been a singling. He could hardly be called a woman-hater, since he was infinitely courteous and respecting to women, but he must be set down as a woman-avoider. Either he had been burned badly once, or the singling nature was in his roots and bones.

He was an abrupt man with a harsh sound to him. There was seldom in itself anything harsh about his acts or his words; the harshness was in the shell of him, in the rind that wrapped him up.

And Least Lass Brindlesby-Fairbridge believed that she wasn't real; and she was. She had been the most beautiful child that anyone had ever seen for no more than an hour or two; until the birth of the children Kora and Heros those twenty-four days ago. She was still of almost perfect beauty; she could only be faulted for a certain heartiness bursting out, too big to be contained in the beauty. She wasn't really the Least Lass anymore; she was as large as her mother; she was bigger than either Kora or Heros. She had a shapeliness and grace superior even to that of her mother, for she was born on World Abounding.

But she looked like Fairbridge Exendine, for all her elegant beauty and for all his craggy ugliness. She looked like him as a daughter will look like a father, as a wife may sometimes come to look like a husband. She had 'grown towards him' in the World Abounding phrase, and all such growths here had to be very swift.

She had a great deal of humor, this girl Least Lass, and she needed it. She was not of flimsy growth: none of the children (children no longer) were. On some worlds and quasi-worlds of rapid growth, there is a defect of quality. The quick-grown tree-sized things will really be no more than giant weeds; the quick-grown creatures will not have much to them. On World Abounding that wasn't so. The quick-grown plants and creatures here were fine-grained and intricate and complete. The persons were so, and especially Least Lass.

She was no weed. Weeds have no humor (except the Aphthonia Sneezeweed, of course). But Least Lass sometimes pursued Fairbridge with humor that would make one shiver.

"My good man holds me in horror," she'd say. "He likes me really, but



he believes that I am unnatural, and he has a real horror for the unnatural. Oh, I will turn him ash-gray and I will turn him fruit-purple! I will turn him swollen blood-black. I'll give him all the seven horrors, and I love him. Fairbridge, Fairbridge, even the rocks are laughing at your horror and your plight, and mine is the rockiest laugh of them all."

Ah, the rocks laughed like clattering hyenas at the poor distraught man.

Sometimes, Least Lass cried a little, though. There is a quick gushiness about tears on World Abounding, a voluminousness that would drown the world if continued more than a short instant. She cried a cupful there one day, actually filled a big blue crystal cup with her tears. Then, in a swift change of mood, she set it at Fairbridge's place at the dinner. And when he, puzzled, tasted it and sputtered, the composite laughter of all assembled nearby shattered his spirit. (Tears on World Abundant are quite pungent, more than just salty.)

Fairbridge Exendine then did a strange thing. He covered the cup with a nap, then wrapped it in a towel and carried it away to his singling quarters to preserve it just as it was.

Then Least Lass cried at least another cupful on the ground. But that was only a matter of seconds. She was always the sunniest girl ever, immediately after tears.

Things wound themselves up in the thirty-first day of the expedition on World Abounding. It was a clear and exuberant day. Both the Grian sun and the Alpha sun could be seen like bright stars in the daylight sky. This is always a good sign. And the Beta sun itself was pleasantly scorching. A good strong day.

We cannot know just how it happened. The fields themselves announced that there was a special and privileged rutting time, not for all, only for a select two. The sand squeaked oestrius sounds. Kora had talked to the Volcano and to the one-of-a-kind subcreature called Marrying Sam, and had learned that the ceremony itself had been a rather stilted one. There was something of very deep emotion cloaked over with layers of rock hard reserve, world deep passion covered with a careful crust. The volcano was familiar with such things in his own person, and explained that such surface covering is often necessary to very deep people.

Then, somewhere on World Abounding, Fairbridge and Least Lass

and the Planet itself had their private experience (an orgy, actually, but their privacy extends even to the selection of the word); they had their time of it, and it may have been a high old time. The others could admire from a distance, and from secondary evidence; but they had no direct evidence, only the planetary resonances and the ghostly reports.

When it was over with, the day and the night of it, when the whole double Nation of those folks was together again, Fairbridge still had that look of horror (it would never leave him). But now it was only one element of many. It was one part of a look or a play more properly named The Comedy of Horror; and this was but a portion of a whole assembly of deep comedies: The Comedy of Soul Agony, the Comedy of Quick Growth (one new furrow in the Fair bridge face represented the almost pun that 'quick' here means 'alive,' means it specially on World Abounding), the Comedies of World Ending, of Love Transcending, or Death and Deep Burial.

Fairbridge hadn't been loosed of any of his own agonies, but at least he had learned that they were funny.

And Least Lass had a look of almost total happiness, it being understood that almost-total happiness is often a shaggy clown-looking thing, with at least a slight touch of insanity, and a more than slight touch of death's-head. Quite a gay girl she was and would always be: she had been born knowing that death is open at both ends.

The end of the world, the end of a discrete culture comes quickly. Lisetta Kerwin worried about a certain impossibility here.

(Four children had been born on the same day; then, two days later, a fifth. That made eight persons of the half nation, the World Abounding Nation; and, of course, there were still the seven persons of the World-Gaea Nation.)

"We have been here for just thirty-six days," Lisetta worried, "and we have more than doubled our population. What if there should be (What is the phrase they used back in the Era of Wonderful Nonsense?) a People Explosion?"

"You know that is impossible, mother," Kora said. "World Abounding sets its own lines, as is the habit of worlds."

"Yes, it is quite impossible, grandmother," Chara Kerwin, the newborn daughter of Kora, said. "This is all there will be for this particular world. I myself, and those of my generation, will not experience it all directly. We

will experience part of it by sharing. Our present numbers are our final numbers. It is less than some worlds have, I know, so we must make up for it by being as vital as we can be.”

“But, in another twenty days or so,” Lisetta protested, “there will be another passion period, and then —”

“No, there will not be,” Kora tried to explain. “To do a thing more than once, to do a thing more than twice (twice is sometimes necessary when there is an intersection of two worlds), that is to become repetitious, and to be repetitious is the unforgivable sin. Touch stone, mother, kick sand, knock wood (as you report is said on Gaea), and pray that it may never happen to any of us.”

“But of course it will happen, children, and it will become an increasingly compounded happening. Consider how many there will be in even one year —”

“A year!” Chara shrilled from the arms of Kora her mother. “Has anyone ever lived for a year?”

“I don’t know,” Kora puzzled. “Has anyone? Have you, mother?”

“Yes, I’m afraid that I have,” Lisetta admitted. But why should she be apologetic at having lived more than one year?”

“I had no idea, mother,” Kora mumbled in half-embarrassment. “I guess this is the reason for the gaps in our communication, however hard we try to close them.”

Then, for a long while (by local standards), it was all an easygoing time on World Abounding. It was a period of action packed leisure (though not all will be able to understand this); it was crammed full of events, the outcomings and incomings of a new maturing fruitful culture. There was not room in the concentrated leisured hours of any of them to experience it all directly; each one must simultaneously live in the mind and body of everyone to be able to contain it all. There was the unhurried rapidity of thought and act and enjoyment. There was little difference in the day and night hours: sleep and wakefulness were merged; dreaming and experience were intermingled. The fulfilled persons would sometimes sleep while walking or even running, especially those of the full World Abounding generations.

“Are we awake or sleeping?” Least Lass asked her lover one day, or night.

“That I do not know,” Fairbridge said, or thought, in whatever state he

was in. "But we are together. May the Planet Plucker grant that we be always together."

"We are together," Least Lass agreed, "and yet I am climbing and leaping on the north ridges of the Volcano Misericors, and I am sound asleep. And you are swimming in the estuary of the River Festinatio, very deep below the surface where it is ocean water below the running water, and you also are asleep. Give me your hand. There! On a false level of reality it might seem that my hand was closed on the meaty bloom of a rock crocus, but that rock crocus is a part of yourself. It might seem, to an observer of no understanding, that your own hand has closed on an Aphthonia Blue-Fish (the Blue-Fish himself is such an observer and he believes this), but that Blue-Fish is really myself with the scales still on his eyes and on his whole fishness. But the scales have fallen from our own eyes a little bit so that we may see reality. Grip my hand very hard."

They gripped hands very hard. They were together.

Ceramic flutes! The flutes were one signature of the present World Abounding culture. They have a tone of their own that cannot be touched by either wooden or brass horns. This light, hard, airy ceramic is made from the deposits of windblown loess from the ocher hills, from the limey mud of the plashes of the River Festinatio, from the ash and the pumice of the Volcano Misericors. This makes a ceramic like no other; there will always be old tunes nesting in every horn and pipe of it.

There were also green-wood clarinets with tendrils still growing on them; aeolian stringed boxes that played themselves in harmonic to whistling; snakeskin drums; hammered electrum trumpets (what a rich sound they had!); and honey-wood violins.

Such orchestration as was employed was of a natural sort. Usually it was the whistling coneys (who are very early risers) who would set the aeolian strings to going: then the several nations of birds would begin to intone; the people, whether waking or sleeping, would soon come in with their composite solos. Or sometimes it was one of the persons who began a music.

"Think a tune, father," Heros Planda might call. And his father Rushmore, afternoon dreaming somewhere in the blue-stem hills, would think of one. Heros would begin to blow a few notes of it, though he might be several kilometers distant from his father. It might be taken up then by boom-birds or by surfacing riverfish with their quick sounding

that was between a whistle and a bark. There was a lot of music in this World Abounding culture, but it was never formal and never forced.

There was a sculpture culture, though Fairbridge warned that it was a dangerous thing. World Abounding was so plastic a place, he said, that one might create more than he had intended by the most simple shaping or free-cutting. "Half the things alive here have no business being alive," he said. "One is not to trust the stones, especially not trust any stones of the Volcano."

Nevertheless, the sculpture culture, done in high and low relief, or in the free or the round, was mostly on the south face of that trustless volcano. Whenever the Volcano exuded a new flow-wall during the night, all the people would be at the bright and soft surface in the morning, before it had cooled. These flow-walls were of mingled colors, of bright jagged colors sometimes, or soft colors at other times, then again of shouting colors: it was a very varied and chemical Volcano and it bled like rock rainbows.

Usually the Volcano himself set the motif for a sculpture-mass. He could do good and powerful work in the rough. He could form out large intimations of creatures and people and events. But he was like a geniused artist who had only stubs, no hands. It was the human persons who had to do all the fine and finishing work of the almost living murals.

The performed dramas of this culture fell into a half-dozen cycles. They were mostly variations or continuations of things done by groups of the dead Terrace peoples, or by primordials before them. They were always part of an endless continuity. Here they might be in scene five of act four hundred of one of the Volcano cycles. Earlier acts had been performed by earlier peoples, by the primordials, by Aphthonian bears, by characters or manifestations which had had no life of their own outside of the dramas.

Poetry wasn't a separate act here. The people of World Abundant were poetry, they lived poetry, they ate poetry, they drank it out of cups. All the persons were in rime with each other, so they had no need of the sound of it.

Eating was an art. No two meals on World Abounding had ever been the same. Every one of them was a banquet, beyond duplication, beyond imitation.

So it went on for a long while (by local standards); it went along for

near three standard months. All the persons of the native World Abounding generations now appeared to be about the same age, this in spite of the fact that some of them were parents of others of them.

3

“We have done absolutely everything,” Chara Kerwin said one day. “Some of us, or other of us, or all of us have done everything. Now we will wind it up wonderfully. Is it not a stunning thing to have done everything?”

“But you haven’t done everything, you bumptious child,” Lisetta told her. “You haven’t borne children, as your mother has, as myself your grandmother has.”

“But I have. I have borne myself, I have borne my mother Kora, I have borne you, my grandmother Lisetta, I have borne every person ever birthed on World Abounding or elsewhere. What we do not do as individuals, we do in common. All of our nation has now done everything, as I have. So we will wind it up.”

All eight of the gilded youths of the World Abounding nation came at the same time to the realization that they had done everything. They called it back and forth, they echoed the information from the blue-stem hills to the orchards to the mountains. They all came together full of the information. They assembled on the top of the Terraces. They sat down at table there, and demanded that the elder World-Gaea nation should serve them.

“Out-do yourselves!” Least Lass Exendine called to all those elders. “Give us a banquet better than any you ever invented before. But you may not share it with us. It is for ourselves only. Serve us. And eat ashes yourselves.”

So the oldsters, those who had not been born on World Abounding, served the assembled younglings, and did it with delight. There seemed to be a wonderful windup fermenting for all of them.

The Comedy of Horror, perhaps, showed a little stronger than it had recently on the face and form of Fairbridge, but it was still only one of that complex of deep comedies. Fairbridge had a very stark and terrible intuition now. He had a horrifying premonition of the real substance of those twin Comedies of World Ending and of Love Transcending. But even horror is a subject of comedy of World Abounding, and it is supposed to have that jagged edge to it.

“Bring all our things, bring all our artifacts,” Chara ordered when they were still deep in the wining and dining. “Bring all our instruments and robes and plaques and free sculptures. Pile up enough food for a dozen banquets. Bring our green shroud-robes.”

“It may be that you have not really done everything,” Fairbridge said once in white agony while all the things were being piled up. “Let us think if there is not something left that you haven’t done.”

“No, no, good father, good husband, good lover, good ancestor, good descendant, good Fairbridge mine,” Least Lass was saying, “we have done everything. We have done everything that could be in your mind, for plumbing the Fairbridge mind to its total depth is one of the many things we have done. And if there is some thing that we really have not done, then we will do it after we are dead. We do all sorts of communicating things in our sleep. Well, we will also do them in our deaths, as do the other dead people living in the Terraces. Fairbridge, my passion, my patsy, my toy, my love, go tell the Volcano that it is time.”

“How should I talk to a Volcano?” Fairbridge asked.

“Why, you will speak to it directly, Fairbridge. Is it not a Gaea proverb that a man may talk to a volcano just as a beggar may talk to a horse or a cat to a king?”

“And I should say what to the Volcano?”

“Simply tell him that it is time.”

Fairbridge Exendine climbed up from the Terraces onto the steep eastern slope of the Volcano Misericors. He climbed clear to the cone. The cone was a ragged laughing mouth; the whole face was a distorted laugh. One eye of that face was far down the north slope, and the other eye was over in the blue-stem hills. The ears were sundered off somewhere; the brow was exploded; the jaw was shattered all over the scree slopes. It was a fine merry face that the Volcano had, even though it was a little disjointed and disparate.

Something overly glandular about this Volcano, though. Ah, it was great-glanded. The Gorgos gland that supplied all of World Abounding was a part of this Volcano.

“Are you sure that it is as funny as all that?” Fair-bridge gruffed at this open-mawed mountain. “It strains my idea of the comic a little. It could stand some revision.”

They both were silent for a little while.

“Ah, the young persons told me to tell you that it is time,” Fairbridge said glumly. The Volcano belched a bit of fire. There was something of cruel laugh in that sound: a snort, really. Fairbridge suspected that the Volcano was more animal than man.

Then the Volcano became somewhat raucous, foulmouthed (“that quip is my own, my last,” Fairbridge said in his throat), rumbling and roaring, smoky and sulphurous, scorching, sooty. Fairbridge left it in his own passion.

He came down towards the shouldering Terraces again. All the World-Gaea people were calling him to come to the plain below where the hovercraft was at the ready. He ignored them. He continued to the high Terraces and to the native generations of World Abounding. It was like hot snakes hissing at his heels as he went, pouring streams of lava. The air had become like a furnace, like a forge with bellows puffing.

The river Festinatio had become quite excited. It palpitated in running shivers of waves. It was a-leap with all its fishy fauna, with all its bold turtles and squids. The Volcano always invaded the river at the climax of its eruptions: each successive Terrace ran further into the River. Nobody should have been surprised at the excitement of the River, nobody who had watched or taken part in the dramas of the Volcano cycles.

Fairbridge came down to the death-edge young people on the Terraces.

“You must not be here with us,” Heros told him. “There is no way that you can earn that right. We are completed, but you are not.”

Fairbridge threw himself down on the Terraces, however, and the ground of the Terraces had already begun to smoke.

“You cannot stay here, my other love, my other life,” Least Lass told him. But he lay at her feet. He embraced her ankles.

“Shall we allow them to stay on the Terraces and be burned to death and buried with ashes?” Judy Brindlesby asked uneasily on the land below.

“Yes. We must allow it,” Hilary said.

“But there is a whole world that will not be covered. Only the Terraces will be covered and burned.”

“Yes.”

“They sit there eating and drinking, and already we can smell the scorched flesh of their feet. They are all so young, and they could live so



long and so happy anywhere else on this world.”

“We don’t know that they could live any longer. We don’t understand it.”

“But they are our children.”

“Yes.”

“Shall I feed you scraps from the table as though you were a dog at my feet?” Least Lass asked Fairbridge. “Go at once now. You have no business dying here. Go with them. They come in great danger and pain to themselves to get you.”

Rushmore Planda and Blase Kerwin came and dragged Fairbridge off the top of the smoking Terraces and down the slopes where lava and ash flow ran like lizards. All were burned, and Fairbridge was dangerously burned.

They went into the hover-craft, the seven persons who had not been born on World Abounding. They rose into the smoky volcanic air, and they hovered.

The young people, the World Abounding people, still sat and wined and dined themselves on the scorched Terraces. The hot ash and the fiery liquid shoved in upon them and rose to engulf them. They were encapsuled and preserved in the caking hot ash. Least Lass, at the rivermost edge of the Terraces, was the last of them to be completely covered. She made a happy signal to them in the hover-craft, and her mother Judy signaled back.

Hot ash filled the banquet plate of Least Lass by then, and hot lava filled her cup. Smiling and easy, she ate and drank the living coals to her pleasant death. Then she had disappeared completely under the flow of it, as the rest of them had done.

The Volcano covered them with another two meters of fill. Then he pushed on to have his will with the river.

“It did not happen, it could not have happened, it must not be allowed to have happened,” Fairbridge Exendine was mumbling inanely, but Fairbridge was mind out of body now. His mind was at the feet of Least Lass in the merciful ashes of the new topmost Terrace.

“The report will be a difficult one,” Hilary hazarded. “Just how are we to explain that a normal human settlement is impossible here? How explain that it will always end in such swift short generations? How explain that every World Abounding culture is, by its nature, a terminal

culture?” “Why bother?” asked Erma Planda of the still golden body and emerald eyes. “We will make the entry that several of the other expeditions have made. Yes, and we will be classed as such disgraceful failures as they have been. What else to do?”

She wrote the damning entry quickly.

“We were warned that there would be some necks wrung if that phrase was used in our report,” Rushmore said sourly.

“Wring my neck who can,” Erma challenged. “There. It’s done. And they really wouldn’t have believed it, you know.”

## GROANING HINGES OF THE WORLD

Eginhard wrote that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them in the Carnic Alps north of the Isarko and quite near High Clockner, and the other one in the Wangeroog in the Frisian islands off the Weser mouth and under the water of this shelf; and that these hinges are made of iron. It is the Germanies, the whole great country between these hinges that turns over, he wrote, after either a long generation or a short generation.

The only indication of the turning over is a groaning of the World Hinges too brief to terrify. That which rises out of the Earth has the same appearance in mountains and rivers and towns and people as the land that it replaces. The land and the people do not know that they have turned over, but their neighbors may come to know it. A man looking at the new, after the land had turned over, would not see it different from the old: and yet it would be different. But the places and the persons would have the same names and appearances as those they replaced.

Strabo, however, eight hundred years earlier, wrote that the Hinges of the World are in high Armenia, the one of them on the Albanian extension into the Caspian Sea, the other at Mount Ararat itself (known from the earliest time as the hinge of the world). Strabo wrote that it is the whole Caucasus Mountains that turn over, with all the people and goats: and the hinges on which the region turns are bronze.

But Elpidius claimed that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them at Aneto in Andorra (ancciano Gozne del Mundo), and the other at Hendaye on the Biscay coast. He stated that it is the Pyreenes that turn over, that their turning is always for a very long generation, and that the Basques who obtain in that region are people from under the earth and are much more Basque-like than those they replace. He wrote that the Hinges of the World are here of rock-crystal.

All three of the writers give the name Revolution to this turning over of a region, but lesser authorities have later given that name to less literal turnings. There is something very consistent about the reports of these three men, and there are aspects of their accounts almost too strange not to be true.

But they all lie. How would any of these regions turn over on hinges? And if they have the same appearance in land and people after they have turned over, who would know that they had turned? It would seem that if

a man have the same name and appearance after he has turned over, then he is still the same man.

As to the deep groaning of the World Hinges which all three authorities state is heard at the time of turnover, why, one hears groanings all the time.

The only region of the world that does in fact turn over is far around the world from all of these. It is in the western Moluccas. One hinge is just north of Berebere on Morotai Island and the other is at Ganedidalem on Jilolo or Halmahera Island. These are the true Hinges of the World and they are made of hard kapok-wood well oiled.

All the peoples of this region were peaceful with themselves and their neighbors almost all the time. The people under the world were no more than people in stories to them. There was fire under the islands, of course, and volcanos on them; and the people under the earth were said to be themselves brands of fire. Well, let them stay under the world then. Let the hinges not turn again!

But one day a fisherman from Obi Island was out in his boat right on the edge of the region that was said to have turned over in the old times. He had pulled in only a few fish in his nets and he had about decided to sail to Jilolo and steal enough fish from the timid people there to fill his boat.

Then he heard a short, deep groaning. He felt a shock, and a shock-wave. But who pays attention to things like that around the volcano islands? He was uneasy, of course, but a man is supposed to be uneasy several times a day.

He pulled in his net. Then he felt a further shock. This net had been torn in one place and he had tied it together. He had tied it, as he always did, with a pendek knot. But now he saw that it was tied with a panjang knot which he had never tied in his life. He noticed also that the fish in his net were of a little bit darker color than usual. He wouldn't have noticed this if he hadn't noticed the knot first. In great fear he set his short sail, and he also drove his oar as hard as he could to take the boat toward his own Obi Island.

The only region where the panjang knot is commonly tied is the region under the world. This region had turned up in the age of the fisherman's ancestors, to the death and destruction of many of them, and now it may have turned up once more. A part of the fisherman's net must

have been in the region that turned over, he was that close to the fringe of it. The fisherman knew that the upheaval people would have the same names and appearances as people he knew; he knew also that the whole business might be a high storm.

Fast canoes out of Jilolo overtook the fisherman before he was home. He was frightened at first, but when they came closer to overhaul him, he saw that the men in them were friends of his, Jilolo people, the most gentle people in the world. You could push the Jilolos, you could steal their fish, you could steal their fruits, you could even steal their boats, and they would only smile sadly. The fisherman forgot all about the turnover when the gentle Jilolos overtook him.

“Hello, Jilolo men, give me fish, give me fruits,” the fisherman said, “or I will run down your canoes and push you into the water. Give me fish. My boat is not near full of fish.”

“Hello, our friend,” the Jilolo men said to the fisherman. Then they came on board his boat and cut off his head. They were men of the same names and appearances as those he had known, and yet they were different.

The Jilolos tied the fisherman’s head onto the prow of the foremost and biggest canoe. “Guide us into the best landing of Obi Island,” they told the head. So the head guided them in, telling them whether to veer a little to the east or the west, telling them about the cross-wave and the shoal, telling them how to go right to the landing. (The shy Jilolos had formerly used a poorer landing when they came to Obi Island.)

“Shout a greeting,” the men told the head when they were very near the land. “They will know your voice on shore. Tell them to bring out all their spears and fish-spears, and the Dutch gun, and stack them all by the landing. Tell them we are their good friends come to play a game with them.” So the head shouted it all out.

The Obi men came out and stacked all their spears and the fish-spears and the Dutch gun by the landing, chuckling over whatever new game it should be. Weapons had not been used for anything but games for many years.

The Jilolo men came onto shore. They took the spears and the Dutch gun. One of them understood the gun. He shot it three times and killed three of the Obi men with it. Other Jilolo men killed other Obi men with spears and with clubs they brought with them.

“This is the game we play with you,” the Jilolos said. They caught twenty of the Obi girls and young women and took them with them. They gave instructions as to what tribute must be brought to them weekly by the Obis. They killed two more Obi men to make sure that their message was understood. Then they went away in their canoes.

And it was all confusion that they left behind them.

One of the Obi men, however, in spite of the killing and confusion, had untied the fisherman’s head from the prow of the biggest canoe. Now some of the frightened Obi men took the head with them into the long hut and questioned it as to what this should mean.

“The region has turned over on its hinges,” the fisherman’s head said, “just as it sometimes turned over and over again in the days of our distant grandfathers. I was out in my boat fishing. I heard the short, deep groaning; I felt the shock, and the shockwave. But who pays attention to things like these around the volcano islands? Then I pulled in my net with the few fish in it.

“This net had been torn in one place, and I had tied it together with a pendek knot. Now I saw that it was tied with a panjang knot, which I never tied in my life, but which the people under the earth tie. I noticed also that the fish in my net were a little darker color than is common. This means that I was on the edge of the region and the region has turned over.

“Oh my family and my people, it is all misery and death for us now! The Jilolo men will have the same names and appearances as those they have displaced, but you see already that they are not the same. No more will we be able to push the Jilolos down and take their fish and fruits and boats. We will not be able to push them into the water or have fun with them. They have taken the bodies of some of our men with them; they have taken some of our girls and young women with them; and they will be having fun with both tonight. We used to make jokes with each other about the stories that we used to eat each other. It has come back to us now. That whole part of the world has turned over on its hinges. We die in our woe.”

The fisherman’s head was in great pain. One of the men gave it a stick to bite on. And in a little while it died.

And there followed one of the most horrifying ages ever in those lilac waters. The turned-up Jilolos were the demons, the old slavers come

back. They were like the tearing, meat-eating birds swooping in. They were like bloody dragons. They came one day and took an Obi man away from his brother. The next day they came again and said, "Your brother wants to talk to you."

They had a drumhead covered with the brother's skin. They beat on it till it sounded like the brother's voice booming. That is what they meant that his brother wanted to talk to him.

These Jilolos gnawed roast meat from men's ribs as they strode about for mockery. They burned down the huts and the long huts of the Obi. They did the same thing to the people of Batjan and Misool and Mangole and Sanana. All the leading men of those places were hiding in the hills.

The Jilolos said that they would kill nine men for every leading man who was hiding. Many of the leading men, hearing of this, came out of their hiding and let themselves be killed to save the lives of many more. Soon there were only a few leading men left. The Jilolos cut out the eyes and tongues and gonads of people and left the people blind and mutilated and dying. They roasted some of the people alive. People are best that way, they said. "How is it that in the old days we ate only fish and pig and fruit?" the Jilolos asked. "How have we missed this fine thing so long?"

The Jilolos set fires in the coconut groves and spice bushes and kapok forests of the five islands. Fires rose over these islands day and night, brighter even than the volcano fires of Jilolo itself. Anyone who tried to put out the fire would be burned up in the fire, they said.

They tied sacks over the heads of men before they killed them. This was to trap their souls and kill them too. They were merciless. They violated and killed little children. They skinned some people before they killed them. They killed so many people that they took only their eyes and hearts to eat. Carrion birds gobbled down from the high air, and sharks jostled into the waters drawn by more blood than had been known for many ages.

So it went for a year and a day. Whole islands moaned and bled with the abomination of it, and the oceans were black with reeking blood.

There was one old Dutchman who still lived on Obi Island. After the Dutch days, he had gone home to Dutchland. He had missed the really busy seas and ports with the tang of trade to them, and the ordered rich land in all its bright neatness. He had been homesick for many years, so he went home.

But he found that the home seas were cluttered with belching ships that fouled the air (he had forgotten that part); he found the land was overcrowded with Dutchmen all busy and benign (he had forgotten that part too); and the roads and lanes were full of bicycles and motor cars. He found that it was cold and gusty and demanding, and the bright neat colors were not nearly so bright as those of the islands. He discovered that neatness and the appearance of respectability were required of him, and he had long since turned into a loose old rounder. He became homesick for the second time, and he returned to the islands and Obi island. He had found that he could not Dutch it over the Dutch themselves, but he could still Dutch it over the Obis.

Now the Jilolos demanded that the Obis give up their Dutchman to them, or they would kill one hundred Obis. They wanted to have fun with the Dutchman and then kill him in an unusual way. They wanted to see if Dutch flesh was really prime stuff. So the Obis came sadly to their duty.

“We will have to give you up,” they told the Dutchman when they had come to his house in the hills. “We like you, but we don’t like you as well as one hundred of ourselves. Come along now. There is no way out of it.”

“This Dutchman, about to be given up, will think of a way out of it,” the Dutchman said. “A thing that is done can be undone. Can there be found twelve leading men left alive here, and twelve in the peninsula north of Berebere?”

“There are barely that many of us. We are they,” the men said. “We believe that there are barely that many leading men left north of Berebere.”

“Inform yourselves, and inform them,” the Dutchman said. “Each party will go out in twelve fishing boats that have windlass winches for the nets. It will take the power of all the windlasses together to turn the things, and even then it may not work. And both parties will have to do it at exactly the same time.”

“How will we know it is the same time, with the distance between the two groups?” the men asked.

“I don’t know,” the Dutchman said.

But one of the men there had affinity with two large birds of the kind called radjatuult, who were larger than others of their species and special in several ways. They preyed over the ocean as well as over the land (they were, in fact, sea-eagles), they talked more canny than parrots, and they



were more intelligent than the Tekderek, the crane. The man went out of the Dutchman's house and whistled loudly. The two big birds appeared as two dots in the sky, they came on very rapidly, and then they were there with the men.

"Oh yes, I've heard of you two fellows," the Dutchman said to the birds. "If one of you were flying high over Ganedidalem and the other over Berebere, could you still see each other at that distance?"

"Yes, if we were high enough, we could still see each other," one of the birds said.

"And would you be too high to see our ready-signal from the shores then?"

"No, we could see that too," the other bird said. "Tell us what you want us to do."

The Dutchman carefully told them about the affair. Then he said, "The one of you fly now to Berebere and find the men there. Tell them how it is, Tell them that we start now and will be at our place in the early morning. Let them be at their place then too. And caution them to be clear of the Hinges when they do it, on the outside of them, or they may find themselves turned over when it happens. In the morning you two birds will give the signal to each other and to us so we can do it together."

The one bird flew off to Berehere. The twelve leading men, each one taking three lesser men with him, east off in twelve fishing boats. They set sail on the evening wind; and with the wind and the oars going all night, they were off Ganedidalem in the early morning.

They found the great Hinge in an inlet, just where legend had always said it should be. They took the twelve windlass winches off the twelve fishing boats, and the Dutchman rigged them to the kapok-wood axle of the World Hinge. There would be no trouble about the same thing up at Berebere. The men at Berebere are handier and more mechanical than the men of Obi.

Then four men stood at each windlass to throw their weight to the thing. The Dutchman gave the ready signal to the bird in the sky. Then they waited.

One minute later, the bird flared his great wings and began to dive straight down for signal. Long leagues to the north, off Berehere, the other bird did the same thing.

"Heave!" cried the Dutchman. "All heave! For our lives, it is now or it

is nevermore with us!” And all heaved at the windlass winches, turning the cranks while the ropes sounded and moaned.

Then the groaning of the World Hinges, more horrible than could be believed! The Earth shook, and the Island smoked and bawled. This was unnatural, it was a violation. Always before, the hinges had turned from natural forces in the earth that had come to their term and time.

Groaning yet more horrible! The ropes cried like infants from the strain on them, the cranks whined with the sound of hard wood about to shatter. The Hinge groaned a final terrible time. There was the shock! And the shockwave.

Then they were done with it, or they were undone forever.

“Let us go back to Obi Island and wait,” the Dutchman said. “I believe that it turned over when the Hinge groaned last and loudest. If the raiding stops, then we have done it. If it has not stopped, then we are dead forever.”

“Let us go to Jilolo Island and not wait,” the Obi men said. “We will have bloody death there, or we will have us a lot of fun.”

The Obis with the Dutchman rowed and sailed for Jilolo all day, and came there in the evening. They found Jilolo men. They pushed them down, they stole their fish and fruits and boats, they pushed them in the water and laughed at them. This was the fun they hadn’t had for a long time.

These were Jilolos of the same names and appearances as the horrible killers of the last time, but they were different. You could push them down and take advantage of them; you didn’t have to be afraid of them. For they were also the men of the same names and appearances of the time before last, and they only smiled sadly when they were robbed and pushed down.

The Obi men called the girls and young women who had been stolen from them, and took them in the boats with them and went home. So peace returned, and it was all as it had been before with them.

Only not quite.

These girls and young women, robbed from the Obi and now taken back by them, had been on Jilolo when it turned back. It was in reverse with them. With the turning back, they became their own counterparts from under the world, the meanest, most troublesome women ever found anywhere, yet of the same names and appearances as the girls and young

women before. They raised hell from one end of Obi to the other when they got home, and they kept it up all their lives.

So it was a troubled peace that came to Obi. Even so, many said it was better than to be killed by the Jilolo. Others said it was about the same thing.

That is the only place, there in the western Moluccas, where the World Hinges do really turn and a whole region may experience this revolution. The other places are almost surely fable.

A man just back from high Armenia says he examined the hinges there and they are bronze turned green with great age. They apparently have not turned since the drying of the flood. And if Armenia would turn over, who would know it? You can turn an Armenian upside-down and hardly tell it. Those fellows look about the same on both ends.

As to the Germanies, those hinges in the Camic Alps and in the Wangeroog are of badly rusted iron. Nobody can tell when they turned last, but should they turn now (the shape they are in) it would make a groaning heard around the world. Besides, if this country had turned in modern centuries, there would have to be some indication of it; some stark frightful thing would have happened there comparable to the revolution of the Jilolos. The people and places, keeping the same names and appearances, would have become immeasurably different in not too subtle ways, would have become violent and appalling. Is there any report of such a thing happening in our own days or those of our fathers?

And in the Pyrenees, is there any indication that they have turned, lately or ever? Rock-crystal does not rust, but it does acquire a patina of unuse. Yet one has said of the Canigou, which I take to apply to all the Pyrenees and all the people in them, that it is unchanging forever, but that it is created anew every morning. The Hinges at Aneto and Hendaye either do not turn at all or they turn every night.

## ISHMAEL INTO THE BARRENS

*Sometimes, however, a group of animals about to become extinct undergoes considerable change of a pathological nature before it disappears from the scene.*

— Douglas Dewar

It was early in the morning, which was illegal. Which is to say that it was illegal for persons to be about in the early morning. And yet there were a few people, some alive and some dead, scattered about in the morning hours. Most of these were yellow-card people doing necessary work in those hours; another few were authorized nothoi-hunters; the rest were outlaws. All of the dead people lying in the streets were outlaws; but some of the live people also were outlaws unknown.

Really, there was no need for anyone to be about at this time; and if the world were ordered in a perfectly legal manner there would have been none. But the world was not perfectly ordered. There was outlawry and the breaking of the hours rules.

There were the working hours for those of the age when work was still required, and concurrent with these were the basic-enjoyment hours for those beyond that age. Then there were the swinging hours for all (compulsory). And finally there were the morning hours, the forbidden hours — the hours for sleep, for rest, for completing a trip: these were from the fifth hour of the day till the thirteenth. Timers were adjusted so that the sunrise was always in the forbidden hours; and indeed no really good person had ever seen the sun rise, except certain very old ones who had seen it in their uninstructed youths. “No good person was ever the better for seeing the sun rise,” it is written in the Analects.

It was an old and dirty city in the glare of the early illegal sun, but the yellow-card street-sweepers would soon clear away the worst of the debris. The swinging hours always left their clutter, as was their right. Here were yesterday’s cut flowers in heaps, many thousands of broken balloons, posters torn and shredded, remnants of food and drink and vein-main, papers covered with scatter-print, discarded litter and clothing.

Here also, right on the edge of a pile of broken guitars, a woman was

lying twisted and grubby. She was very young and very dead. She was not, however, a casualty of the swinging hours, but of the early morning hours. And there was another one some distance from the first, blowsier and bloodier. They were not rare in the morning hours in the city. Very soon the sweepers would cart them away. By the thirteenth hour all would be clean again, and the Gentle World would begin another day.

But here is the heroine, a live one, perhaps a lively one. Should she not be a platinum woman, scatter-ornamented and beautiful, according to the norms? Or a shiiiiing ebony or a creamy chocolate? Should she not be adjusted and legal? Flowery and scatter-eyed? Should she not be of the multiplexity, nonlineate, a Scan, an Agape Apple, a Neutrino, a Pop Poppy? A Poster Coaster at the very least? Should she not be a Happy Medium, a Plateau Potato, a Twanger, a Mime, a Dreamer, and Enhincer-Dincer? Are these not the aspects of a heroine?

Nah, she wisn't like that at all. She was a Morning-Glory, which is illegal. She was a Gown-Clown, which is also illegal. She was not flowery, not scatter-eyed. She wasn't even quite beautiful though she rather wished that she were, And yet perhaps she was, in another way, in an old and almost private way.

She had form. But was it not now bad form to have form? She had grace and face. She had a forky tongue and a willful way. She even had a measure of gaiety. She was tall and full. Her hair was midnight-black with green starlights in it (really). Her eyes were even blacker with deeper lights. She had a strong element of stubbornness in her, which is illegal. She was a flower-tender, and she was not enchanted with the job. (Something had gone out of the flowers, something had gone out of them.) Her name was Janine Pervicacia. To the people she was Jane the Crane, but she wasn't so leggy as all that.

The flowers, especially those that were to be cut this day, needed care in the morning hours, and for that reason this yellow-card girl was tending them. But she tended them lineately, which was illegal.

Here is the hero. Should he not be a Swing, a Slant, a Cut, according to the norms? A Spade, a Btick, a Whanger? Should he not be a Head, a Flash, an Etch, a Neutrino yet, a Burn, a Vein, a Flower? Yeah, but he wasn't like that. He wasn't that kind of hero at all. He was a Dawner, he was a doggedly pleasant man, he was even a sort of battler ("He saith among the trumpets, Hal ha; and he sinclielli the battle afar off" — Job),

he was friendly; he was even intelligent on some subjects and murderous on others. He was big enough and thick enough; his hair was brambled but short. The people said that he would be the father of Ishmael. He didn't know what they meant; either did the people. He was a moving man with cat-springs in him. He was a yellow-card steet-sweeper, and his name was Morgan Saunders.

He was making his rounds, cleaning up after the swingers. He growled when he came to the twisted and grubby woman who was very young and very dead.

"Secret hid in the bottom of a well, May the nothoi-hunters all go to hell," he chanted, which is illegal (the nothoi-hunters are authorized). He had a very hassle of a time bending the dead woman in the middle (he saw now that she was only a girl) and stuffing her into his wheeled canister. He quickly covered her with shards of broken guitars so she would be hidden from his eyes.

Then he saw Jane the Crane tending flowers. He did not know her. This was her first morning back on the job after a term in a disorderly house. She was tending the flowers as if they were in straight lines, as if they were in rows, going down one file of them and back another. But only in tier mind were they in rows.

"That is not the allowed way to tend flowers, girl," Morgan spoke to her very low. "You must not consider them as growing in rows, even in your thought. Consider them as random scatter-clusters, or there will be a black mark on your record. Consider them as a revolving nexus of patternless broken volutes. They grow random in nature, you know, and the Gentle World is all for the random. I am only trying to help you."

"I know you are. The things I have been put through by people trying to help me! I tell you, though, that nothing grows random in nature. Everything falls into patterns. And flowers very often do grow in terraced tiers and in tufted rows. I've seen them."

"That is very dangerous talk," said Morgan Saunders, "and I believe that the nothoi-htinters are eyeing us even now. Is it possible that I will see you here again tomorrow? Do you know the doubled-up girl in my canister?"

"I know her. Her name is Agar. Yes, it is possible that you will see me here again tomorrow. It is possible that I will be the doubled-up dead girl in your canister tomorrow."

Then Morgan Saunders went on his way, picking up old flowers and broken balloons and guitars and dead women. He went on past the Pop Palace with its high sign in psychedelic dancing dots: "THE GOLDEN DWARF, MAN, MAN, THAT'S MAN!"

And Janine Pervicacia continued to tend the flowers (those that would die today), moving her hands as if the Flowers were in rows; and they weren't.

This is a love and hate story (both were illegal) from the False Terminal Days that were the middle or the twenty-first century. It is very difficult to decode the story and lay it out for the reason that (even in its illegal form) it was printed in scatter-print. No other sort of print was available. Every printing machine, even the small household ones used by private individuals, was both a scatter-printer and a randoming machine. Each letter could have many different shapes and colors, and these were so blended that no two colors or shape-styles might come together, or that nothing might range itself into lines even accidentally.

Scatter-print was the flowering of 150 years of pop-posters. It shouted a complex nonlineate message, or else it did not: but it shouted. There was difficulty that about a third of the signs were not letters at all, had no meaning or sound value to them: and their blending in made the words difficult to read — if one were still a reader and not a depth comprehender. There was also a difficulty in that it was illegal to number pages; ever; in anything, long or short. Pages must be fed in unnumbered, and they were then randomized. And they are very difficult to unrandom.

For this reason there will be anomalies and inconsistencies in this story, for all that we try to untangle it and set it in line. It was (in its first form) an illegal private record by a grieving friend, but we cannot be sure of the order it should fall into. We do not know for sure whether Jane the Crane was the doubled-up dead girl in the canister on the first morning or on the one-thousandth. We do not know when the destruction of Morgan Saunders took place, whether before the birth of Ishmael or after, but we have set it before. And we do not know whether the interlude of the odd man and the Odd God is truly a part of this account or whether it should be interluded at the point we give it or at another. We can but guess how long Jane the Crane was in a disorderly house, and we cannot always tell flashback from future glimpse. We try.

The next morning (we cannot be sure that it was the next morning,

but it was a different morning) Morgan Saunders slowed his cleaning and sweeping as he came near where Janine Pervicacia was tending flowers. It was summer now (flowers, of course, must be grown in all seasons) and perhaps it hadn't been the other time. Janine (Jane the Crane) was revealed as a gown-clown in an old unrevealing dress. There was scarcely a square foot of her body exposed. She worked now with a carefulness and neatness that were unusual. This girl might be beyond help.

"There are dangerous and divergent things in your manner," Morgan said in a low voice. "If you are not more careless you may be sent to a disorderly house. I am only trying to help you."

"I've already been in the disorderly house," Janine said cheerlessly. "I was discharged as incurable and always to be watched."

"How was it there?" Morgan asked. "I have always been afraid of it, for myself. I have been threatened with it, and I am always careful to assume the careless manner."

"It was horrible and depressing. I was put in with very small children, five and six years old. We were taught artless art. 'Form is only the pedestal. Deformity is the statue,' one of the instructors said that first day. 'The trick is to smash the pedestal completely and yet leave something of the statue, Deformity is beauty, always remember that. Form, which is pattern, is always ugly.' That's what he told us. We had classes in pop-posters, which are hand-done scatter-print. We had classes in Lump the Lump, which is plastic modeling. We had classes in finger painting, and paintings by chimpanzees were used as models and suggestions. I noticed of the children that though many of them were handsome and even-featured when they first came to the disorderly house, their features soon altered. One eye would become larger than the other. The two sides of their faces would no longer match. One side of their mouths would be pulled down and the other pulled up. They would come to look as crooked as most people do look. The instructors could tell at a glance which children were being inculcated with the proper sense of deformity: those who themselves became deformed. We talk too long. I am sure we will be watched."

"Wait. We have so much of dinger to spend anyhow. Let us spend a little of it now." And Morgan himself was doing a dangerous thing. He was smoking a short fag, but it was not what you think: not potty, not dotty, not snow, not glow, none of the approved high things. It was old,



forbidden, non-mind-enhancing tobacco. “What else did they try to teach you in the disorderly house?”

“Guitar,” said Jane the Crane. “That remains the worst of all experiences, the hell-thing that certain humans can never accept. I still wake up screaming at night (working in the mornings, I sometimes sleep illegally during the swing hours of night) at the oppressiveness, the whining meanness of it. It is the only instrument that is always random, that does not have to be randomized. Oh, the twang, twang, twang, the eternal flatness of it! ‘After all, is not the purpose of life on earth to accustom the people to life in hell?’ one of the instructors asked. This is one of the permanent quips of the disorderly houses, of course, but the way the instructor said it in a deformed voice out of a deformed face shook me. It is true, Morgan, it is true. Or is it?”

“It is not everywhere true, Janine. It is not my purpose, but it is theirs. What else did they teach the children and fail to teach you?”

“Crudity, nudity; presbys and lesbos; monophony, cacophony; profanity, urbanity; muggery and buggery. Narcosis. Doggery. Flesh-mesh. Much else. Does that stuff not curdle the convoluted ears of you? It should.”

“Do they not have a course to teach ducks to swim? But it seems that a little bit of this would be beyond the scope of five- and six-year-olds, Janine, especially beyond those who had to be sent back for corrections.”

“Never mind, they would remember it and they would be ready for it when their time came to appreciate it. Go now. We have spent too much danger and we are watched.”

“Will I see you here again tomorrow, Janine?”

“Tomorrow or next season, or someday, or never.”

“Will you think of me?”

“I will think of you as if this were another world, towering where it was meant to be high, ordered where it should be ordered, free in the great central things, and free from the dwarfed and compulsory freedoms. I will think of you, Morgan, in ways that are presently unthinkable.”

Janine (Jane the Crane) turned back to caring for her flowers, which she liked but was not impassioned over. And Morgan Saunders went on about his sweeping and cleaning, past the Pop Palace, past the Dog Temple, past Levelers’ Loggia, past the Pseudo-Parthenon, past

Humanity Hall with its great poster in electric scatter-print raising its headless torso into the sky: "MAN, THIS GELDED GLORY OF THE LEVEL WAY."

In the False Terminal Days that were the middle of the twenty-first century the population plateau had been reached. It had not been reached in perfect peace. In an odd piece entitled *The Analects of Issac* we encounter the phrase "the conflicts created in a society which sees in population stability the only hope of the human race." There were conflicts.

There had been hard feelings. Blood had run in the rivers in some localities. But every casualty of this conflict had become part of the feedback of the population-stability calculators. It was settled now. it was enforced. But the conflict continued, and it must still continue till the total death of one or both of the antagonists. It had become one-sided. It looked like the conflict between an elephant and a day fly. But there were irreconcilables. There were die-hards among those midges. And there were also hard-abornings, illegitimate and double-damned and defiant. The plateau had been reached, but there were bumps on the plateau.

Stable population. And the second step (very nearly achieved already) was population homogeneity. For fifty years the restrictions had been most selective. By now those of extreme colors were about of equal number, and the great central blending out-numbered them both. Hereafter, only progeny-crosses between the two extremes or out of the central blending could be permitted; none at all among either extreme.

In any case, with the stack-up (old never die; they don't even fade away) a kid-card now cost a quarter of a million dollars. That was very high, and perhaps it would go even higher.

In any case, again, as either both-white or both-black, there would be an impediment between Janine Pervicicia and Morgan Saunders. (They hadn't talked about a union at all, but they had begun to think about it.) This impediment is mentioned in the old scatter-print record written by the grieving friend. But this record does not indicate which was the color of their impediment, and we do not know it either.

A flower-care inspector had been plaguing Janine Pervicacia. He could not fault her that the flowers in her care were insufficient in numbers and vitality. It was something else. The flowers from her care were reported to be out of sympathy with the flower people. They had not

the right attitude to all this. They had developed sympathies of their own, or of Janine's; and the flower people could feel the alienation, and they complained. There is a fine line here. There really is sympathy and antipathy even in cut flowers, but it is liable to exaggeration and subjectivity by the flower people.

"You will have to conform," the flower-care inspector told Janine. "There is complaint."

"Conform to what?" she asked. "Form is damnable to you."

"You will please to cease using words as having direction, Jnne the Crane flower-carer Fifth-class," he said sharply. "Words are like confetti, like stars, like snowflakes, like — there simply are not words for words! You must conform to nonconformity, of course. Your lineate overview will minimize you in the simultaneous multidepth mosaic appraisal."

"Oh, that! I have already been weighed and found wanting. Do what you will with me, but do not stand and goggle it me."

"We could have a meeting during the swinging hours and come to a certain understanding with each other."

"I'll see you in the Barrens first!"

"Then, if you will not be affectionate or gentle or human, you must improve on your work. Your flowers must show more feeling at once."

"They will show more feeling!" Jane of the forky tongue cried. "They'll bark it you! They'll snap at you with their severed heads!"

Jane the Crane was getting many marks against her record.

And an Official Instigator had been plaguing Morgan Saunders. Oh, must talk to in Official Instigator. They are privileged. They have rights of entry into property and dwellings, and into minds. But they are not direct. They nibble at you; they potshot; they speak in randomized riddles.

This was a very old Instigator; of the very first generation of them. He wore a pop button ("Never trust anyone under ninety"); he wore a pop beard which was perhaps infested; he wore a loincloth, he wore shamle-sandles; he wore flowers and sashes and ribbons and jewelry, but no real garment. He rated as old even in a world made up mostly of old people. He was an Ancient Hippie indeed.

"You find me objectionable, Morgan in my hands," he sniped, "and that is a most dangerous finding of yours. You are an alien to the Gentle World, Morgan, and you are known as the philosopher of the street-

sweepers. But the world doesn't need a philosophy — not a rigid street-sweeper philosophy, at any rate. We will snip those rigid corners off you, or we will snip that rigid head off you. Whence are you named? Yours isn't a name from the randoming machines. Therefore it is an illegal name. In one old context Morgan meant 'from over the sea'; in another it meant 'morning', which is very significant in your case."

"In still another case it meant a pony, old man," Morgan said. "A very stylish pony."

"Can a Morgan pony sire a wild ass?" (Somehow the old Instigator already knew about the wild-ass boy Ishmael, who was not even conceived yet, much less born.) "But run, Morgan, run," the old Instigator went on. "We will catch you with our gentle pursuit. Why do you resist us who are kind to every living creature?"

"Kind to every living creature, old man? But you murder the nothoi."

"Are the nothoi living creatures, Morgan? Not in law, not in fact. Who will admit ever seeing such creatures? Who will admit that there are such things living anywhere? They are fables, Morgan, fables from the Barrens. They are less substantial even than ghosts. Prove that they are not. Take me and show me a nothos."

"That would be the death of both myself and the small thing." "If they cause deaths, then they are demons. Who could find fault with the ritual laying of such ghosts and demons?"

This Official Instigator was one of the authentic Ancient Hippies, those in the hundred-years-and-over class. They had station and rights. They had final honor.

"We are the open world," said this Ancient Hippie. "We open, and you will not come in to us."

"You are not open, old man," Morgan insisted. "You close the great way itself. You open only mole runs, and you go blind in their windings, proclaiming them to be the great way. We stubborn ones are for the open world that is gone."

"It is you who withdraw, Morgan. You withdraw from the Gentle World."

"You withdraw from life, old man, and the withdrawal syndromes are weird and twitchy."

"Be careful, Morgan. I and mine are main things in the withdrawal syndromes, and we will not be spoken of slightingly. Can you not see that

you are wrong? You do not see how curiously you withdraw from life in opposing me here? Do you not know that you have just passed death sentence on yourself?"

"Certainly I know it," Morgan said.

It was true, Everything spoken to an Instigator was recorded, and the records were fed to appraisal machines. But how many seals does it take on a death sentence? Morgan Saunders knew that there were very many on his already.

But he walked out on the Instigator, which was illegal. He went on about his work, on past the Hippie Hippodrome, with its high sign of writhing splatter-paint: "MAN, OUR STUNTED PURPOSE AND OUR GREATEST STUNT."

The nothoi-hunters plagued both Janine Pervicacia and Morgan Saunders, following them, leveling guns at them, mocking them, hungering for them. The nothoi-hunters had the sense of prey; they had sophisticated equipment. They killed a lot. They were authorized to kill a lot. But they did not want to hunt out their field. Here it was a special prey that they waited for and counted on, that they counted on even before it came into being, that they everlastingly hoped for. The hunters asked both Janine and Morgan when Ishmael would be along, this even before the time when Janine and Morgan had met. But now Morgan and Janine had met, and they talked about Ishmael, not realizing it, never having heard the name, not realizing that they were talking about a coming person.

"Expectation of anything is out of order, of course," Morgan said to Janine, "and is not much hope in hope. Nevertheless, I got a distant tang of something that may not be all wrong. Are you with me in it, Janine, if we discover some good way (even if it is a short way) away from this?"

"I am with you in anything you want to do, o Morgan with the short bramble hair, but it is all at an end. Everything goes down, and we go down with it."

"We will not go down, Janine. This is not the end yet, even for such as we are."

"Yes, the ending, Morgan, the evening of the seventh day."

"Janine, the seventh day had no evening. For better or worse, for many thousands of years we have lived in the afternoon of the seventh day, maybe even in the morning of it. And we live in it yet. Will I see you

here tomorrow?”

“No. Not for several days, or weeks, or months. I will do a thing, and I will not tell you what it is till it’s done. Goodbye, then, for some days or weeks or months, or forever.”

2

What things a man or a world believes or disbelieves will permeate every corner and shadow and detail of life and style, will give a shape to every person and personifact and plant of that world. They will form or they will disorder, they will open or close. A world that believes in open things is at least fertile to every sort of adventure or disaster. A world that believes in a closed way will shrivel and raven and sputter out in frosty cruelty.

Audifax O’Hanlon

When Morgan saw Janine no more in the mornings the world became a deprived place. He was still plagued by the nothoi-hunters, who mocked him, and by the official instigators, who conversed with him. One afternoon, after he had put away his brooms and rakes and shovels and was on his rest period, he walked out into the Barrens, which was illegal. He found no nothoi there at all nor any trace of them. He did find cattle that had gone feral, wild swine, and rabbits and deer. He found streams that were full of fish and frogs; he found berries and fruits and hazelnuts. He found patches of wild wheat and rye, and sweet corn and melons.

“What is the reason I could not live here?” he asked himself out loud. “I could come here with Janine and we could live and flourish, away from the clang of industry and the clatter of the guitar-makers’ factories. What is the reason I could not live here?”

But his left ear left his head at that moment, and immediately afterward he heard (with his right ear) the sound of the shot. Angry and scared, he clawed and crawled and rolled and made his way out of the Barrens and back to the fringes of the city.

“The reason I cannot live in the Barrens is that the nothoi-hunters will kill me as a nothos if they see me there,” he said quietly. “They all kill any illegal person they find in the Barrens. And it was no mistake they made. They could see plainly that I was a grown man and not a nothos. Here I am now, one-eared and sad-hearted and — oh, oh, oh — here is an even sadder thing come to worry me!”

It was an Official Instigator wishing to talk to him. Morgan could not be sure whether it was the same Instigator who had talked to him several times before. Those Instigators who belong to the Ancient Hippie aristocracy (the one-hundred-years-and-older class) all look pretty much alike.

“We get you piece by piece, Morgan afraid to wander.” the Instigator said. “Today an ear, tomorrow another thing, and very soon we will get you all and entire. If you would not listen to reason with two ears, how can you listen with one? There was a question that arose many years before you were born, so it does not really concern you at all. The question arose, and the answer was given. The question was simply, ‘What will we do when there are too many people in the world?’ And the answer given was, ‘We will pass edict so that there never will be allowed too many people in the world.’ Why do you not accept the gentle and wise answer?”

“The answer was out of order. Your whole complex is out of order in several senses of the term. That is why you will not accept order in any of the central things. That is why you must substitute deformity for form. I do not accept your answer because it is the wrong answer.”

“How is it wrong, one-eared Morgan? What could possibly be wrong with it?”

“It is the static answer to a dynamic question and therefore the wrong answer.”

“Could you have given a righter answer?”

“Of course not. But I could have contributed to it, and you could have also. The answer would have to grow like an organism. And it would have grown.”

“There was no time to permit an organism to grow. It was a matter of great hurry.”

“No, there was no great hurry, and the answer was already growing apace until it was hacked to death. There had been some signs or a full blooming springtime for mankind, and this frightened the The Population Blessing was a challenge, as all large and fine things are. There was only one question: whether we were a good enough people to accept the greatest gift ever offered. And the answer given was, No, we are not.”

“But we splendid ones in our youth gave another answer, little die-

hard Morgan,” the Instigator said. “We will not abide a clutter of people, we said. Chop them off; there are enough and too many, we said. Really, it was a splendid answer, and I tell you that we were a splendid people.”

“Evil always wins through the strength of its Splendid Dupes’, as a wise man said, and yet I doubt that you were ever splendid. You aren’t now.”

“But we are, little Morgan the philosopher of the street-sweepers, we are splendid and talented, gentle and random, creative and inventive.”

“No, old man, you know that creativity and invention have disappeared completely. Why should they not? Residue technique will suffice to maintain a plateau. It is only for mountain-building that creativity and invention are required. You were the loss-of-nerve people. And it is hard for a small remnant to restore that nerve when every thing has flowed the other way for near a hundred years.”

“Morgan of the remnant, your pieces are so little that they cannot even find each other. You lost everything completely before you were born. Listen to me: I am a wise and long-lived man. The old sophistry that there are two sides to every question has long passed away. Instead of that, there are mutual exclusions that cannot live in the same world with each other. The great consensus and the small remnant can no longer live in the same world. What odds

could you post, little Morgan, on our going and your remaining?”

“Very weak odds, but I am more and more inclined to play them out.”

“We have recorded almost enough on you to terminate you right now. Is it not curious that a man shot in the ear will bleed out of the mouth — in words? The nothoi-hunters are better shots than that, you know. They but practice of you till we give them the final word on you. We have checked your own ancestry. You yourself are a nothos, for all that we can find to the contrary. No kin-card was ever issued for you. We could classify you for extinction at any time, but we will wait a little while and have spectacle out of you.”

The nothoi-hunters in fact were very good shots. They had prediction scopes on their rifles. These small directors had the evasion patterns of many small animals and of the small nothoi worked out: the rush, the scurry, the broken pace, the double, the zigzag. With the pattern of those built into a scope the hunters could hardly miss.

The nothoi-hunters themselves were square pegs who happened to fit



into certain square holes of the Gentle World. They were not gentle (not every one can be gentle even on that low plateau); they were naturally troublesome and warlike. Now their proclivities were channeled to a special job. They exterminated certain unlawful things. They did it thoroughly and well. And they made high sport out of it.

And there were other summary things in the system of the Gentle World. This very afternoon, right at the beginning of the swing hours, there were several executions under the recusancy laws. Many persons refused to take part in the swing hours. This was the same as refusal to be happy. To the offenders, first there was warning, then there was mutilation, then there was death. A half dozen of such public hangings would usually minimize the absences from swing time for a while.

There was a stubborn girl ready to be hanged, and at first Morgan thought that she was Janine. She was much the same type. She refused to recant; she refused to take her dutiful place in the Gentle World. She had refused three times to join the swing fun. Likely she was mad, but her madness might be dangerous and contagious.

“You refuse to have fun with the funsters?” an Ancient Instigator asked her almost tearfully.

“I always have fun,” the girl said loudly. “It’s more fun to be me dead than you alive. And I will not endure anything as stifling as the swing times. Drop dead, old man!”

“You might at least respect my position as Ancient Instigator.”

“I’d see the last Instigator strangled with the strings of the last guitar!”

So the girl was hanged, drawn, and quartered. Morgan, though he had often seen these little dramas, was deeply shocked: not so much by the girl’s bad-mannered defiance as by the punishment itself. She looked so like Janine and talked so like her that it was frightening.

Then Janine came back and was busy with her flowers again one morning. The flowers remembered her (it had not really been such a long time), and they came alive to her. Janine was not impassioned with the flowers (as many in the Gentle World had the pose of being), but they were impassioned with her. They always had been.

“Where have you been this while?” Morgan asked her. “At the end of every morning I examined all the bodies gathered up by all the sweepers, and you were never among them.”

“I And awhile. And I had an illegal operation performed on myself.”

“Which?” Morgan asked. “What did it do to you?”

“It undid,” Janine said. “It undid the earlier operation. Now I am open to life once more.”

“And under the automatic sentence of death you are! And I am if I say the word. I say the word. I am.”

“I know a Papster priest,” said Janine.

“And I know one,” said Morgan. “We will go to mine.”

“No, we will go to mine,” she insisted. But they couldn’t have quarreled over that or over anything. There wasn’t room for that in the narrow margin of life left to them. Besides, it happened that it was the same Papster priest they both knew. There weren’t more than two or three of those hidden ones in that city of a million.

They went to the Papster priest and were inarried, which was illegal.

The Papster must have been lonesome for the central things, so he brought out his eloquence, which had grown rusty, and gave a doctrine to their act.

“What you do is right,” he said, “no matter how illegal it is. This world had become a stunted plant, and it was not meant to be. Deformity can never be the norm. The basic and evil theory was: that (by restriction) fewer people could live better and more justified. But they did not. Fewer people live, an(] they live as dwarfs. Not even China in the thousand yeirs it was frozen (it also muclily in an opium dream) was as deprived and listless as this world. The Cities of the Plateau may be destroyed as were the Cities of the Plain, I do not know. We live in that which calls itself a biological world, but no one seems to understand the one central fact of biology, of the life complex.

“This is the one biological fact that all present biologists ignore to their own incompetence: that every life is called into being by God and maintained in being by God at every instant of that life; that an without God there is no bios, no life, and certainly no biology. There can never be an unwanted life or an unwanted person, ever, anywhere. If a person were not wanted by God, God would not call him into being, There can never be too many persons, because it is God who counts and records and decides how many there should be. There can never be a person unprovided for, because it is God who provides. Whoever does not believe in this Providence does not believe in God. Once there was some nonsense on this subject. Now it is pretty well dispelled, and the pretense

of believing in one and not the other has about vanished.”

The priest wrinkled his nose for the sweat running down it. It was a hot underground hole that they came to for the secret marriage.

“But they bug me, the biologists and their dwarfed biota,” the priest went on “If they cannot see the central fact of their own science, if they cannot see this fact in the knotted tangle of chromosomes and in the ladders of the double helices, then they have eyes in vain. Ah — I talk too much, and perhaps you do not understand me.”

“We understand you,” Morgan and Jane said together.

“May the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, ah — the God of Ishmael — the God of Jacob be with you, and may He fulfill in you His blessings,” the Papster said; then he said other things, and they married each other before him.

The background didn't mean much immediately after that. It could have been still on the plateau; it could have been on a mountain or in a deep ravine or over the sea. What happened was gaiety. Morgan and Janine cut up in their lives. No, no, not the dwarfed singing and jittery whining of the Gentle World grown old so gracelessly. This was the song-central thing. They joked, they carried on, they startled, they set fires in what had been too dry, too lacking in substance, even to burn. Like magic they came to know other couples of their same state, ten of them, twenty of them, all in subservient positions and none of them servile. All of them hidden, all of them dangerously open. They were a new thing in the air. The Official Instigators flared their nostrils at the new scent; and the nothoi-hunters caught wind of a now strong prey and shook in their hate and anticipation.

Morgan and Jane the Crane even joked about which of them would run out his string first. “It will be you, Janine,” Morgan jibed. “I will sweep you up one morning. ‘Is it Agar?’ I will ask, ‘or is it the Crane?’” And I will say, ‘Oh, she bends hard in the middle!’ And I will Stuff you into my canister. And then there will be another girl selling Flowers, and I will begin to carry on with her.”

“Be in not so much hurry to sweep me up,” Janine said, “or you will have to bear Ishmael yourself. It will be hard on you, Morgan, you so narrow in the pelvic girdle, you lacking in so many ways. When you come to give birth to him, you will wish that I were back to do it.”

“Oh, we will keep you alive a little while then,” Morgan said, “and I

will try to stay alive myself. A doubly posthumous child always has a hard time of it. At least one of its should be around. Ah, the hunters shoot me through with their eyes a dozen times a day, and the Instigators are fashioning the last seal for my certificate. What is taking Ishmael so long anyhow? Mayhap he'll be a monster. They have longer gestation periods. Better a monster than the sort of dwarfs that abound now."

"He will be a wild ass or,, man, and that is surely monster enough," Janine said. "Get gone. The flower-care inspector has been plaguing me, and he is coming now. I love you more than the sky itself. Not much more, but a little. Get gone."

The flower-care inspector was always in a great fury with Janine now.

"Do you not know that the flower-care girl over on Western Avenue had her tongue cut out for talking overly much with a sweeper?" she asked. "Yellow-card morning people have not the right to talk freely. And why are you so clothed? Why are you so overclothed? There is scarcely a square foot of flesh showing on you. What do your silly affectations work toward anyhow?"

"The world clothed and in its right mind," said Janine Pericicacia.

"Clothes sometimes hide things!" the flower-care inspector shrilled.

"Oh, they do!" Janine beamed. "They do."

Those were the days. When you rise above the plateau you rise above it in all ways. There was hope everywhere; and there was no single detail that could give any possible hope. There was a man from over the sea (as was Morgan of that name) who said that things were much the same elsewhere, congealed, dwarfed, and vapid. Yet he was full of sunny strength and quick laughs. There was a man there from over the prairies. He said that the prairies were disaster areas now for all free and illegal people. They were hunted down and killed from the air by fog poisons that had first been tried out on coyotes. There was a man there from the north woods. He said that the nothoi-hunters up there were real hunters, and there was no bag limit. They didn't seem to care if they did hunt out the game. It would be replenished, they said, or they would hunt elsewhere when they had done with it. There was a man there from that ghetto that is under the ghetto, from the sewers that are under the sewers. He said that the very small pockets of free and illegal people underground were being systematically killed by spray poisons that had first been tried out on rats.

But still there was high hope: not for long life, of course, but for bright and embattled life, fine for issue. But the way was getting mighty narrow.

“All joking aside,” Morgan told Janine one morning, “you win our little bet and game. This is the last morning of my life. They get me today.”

“Take some of them with you, man!” Janine spat with her forked tongue.

“No. We won’t go to the same place; but I may send some of them another way.”

“Break for the Barrens, man!” Janine sounded. “In short months I and the boy will come to you there.”

“Oh, I break to them now,” Morgan said, “but I must pass through an Instigator and a circle of hunters first. This world, my love, is only temporary, of time. We have another one. But we are appointed to this world first. It is of ourselves, part of our bodies. It is mean, and are we not also? It is not better, because we did not make it any better, this withered world is both our ancestry and our issue, however deformed it may be. Remember, Janine (and this is important) never hate this world; but it will be hateful. Remember also we always loved the early mornings.”

“I will remember,, Morgan. Go happy with it now. See how joyful I say it! Your dead ears may hear me shrilling like a demented woman fifteen minutes from now; do not believe them. Remember that I said, ‘Go happy with it.’“

Morgan Saunders slid through the early morning streets toward the edge of the city in the direction of the Barrens. He was a moving man with cat-springs in him. It was his last morning by all the odds, but he would give them a run or a fight for it. Then his own particular Official Instigator loomed up in front of him, the Ancient Hippie of the more-than-a-hundred-years class, the nemesis who had already obtained the warrant for Morgan’s death and who would turn the hunters loose on him whenever he wanted to.

“Get out of my way, old hip,” Morgan warned. “I’m in a hurry.”

“Oh, do not be in a hurry, man,” the old Instigator protested. “Talk to me. It is you who are going to die today. It is you of the illegitimate life that we have enough to kill a dozen times. If I were you I would say, ‘Let them be impatient; let them wait a little.’ They cannot kill you till I give

the word. Talk to me, man.”

“Talking won’t change a thing, oldster. And I go to a better thing than this, whether I get to the Barrens or to my death. Why shouldn’t I be in a hurry for a better thing?”

“Talking did change everything once, Morgan-Sorgen. We whipped you once by talk alone, not even very good talk. We won the world to our way by our talk. And now you are nothing at all but a remnant and a sport. You are less than the tenth of one percent. If I were of the tenth of one percent I would be silent. And we can extinguish even that minuscule of you whenever we wish.”

“But we reappear. You will not be rid of us. We grow back. Why are you ifrand to let the tenth of one percent speak? You shake, you fume, you slander, you vilify.”

“You are our prey and you have no right to opinion or voice. We keep a very few of you for the hunting only. You will not grow back if we wish to end the game. Why have you never accepted our consensus? It is really rather interesting, rather arty, rather gentle, rather novel.”

Several sets of nothoi-hunters were waiting in the near distance. There was in particular the set of Peeler and Slickstock and Quickcoiner; these had claim on Morgan Saunders as their special game.

“The same novelties for a hundred years are no longer novel, old man,” Morgan shot, shifting nervously but having to endure the talk. “And divergent art is of some interest for a while, as long as there is a main thing for it to diverge from. Yes, you even had a touch of humor and a touch of kindness once. But now you are cut flowers, no more than that; worse, you are artificial cut flowers. It is your loss of nerve, it is your regression, it is your dwarfing yourselves and creeping into strange wombs for shelter. You lost your courage first of all, then your honesty and your common sense. As falsehood and ugliness are equated, you set out to create a world of unsurpassed ugliness. Painting and sculpture were perverted first. Then music withered and whimpered into stringed idiocy. Then all the arts went and all the life ambients. You claimed that it was an opening up, a meaningful development. It wasn’t. It was an end, and there is no meaning or development in a dead end. These are the Terminal Days that you have brought about.”

“You are jealous of our success, little Morgan from over the sea. Judge us by our beautiful divergence that works. Recognize us by our results.”

“Aye, by your fruits we may know you,” Morgan said. It was an unkind jibe, and it got under the Instigator’s skin. That Ancient Hippie piled in anger.

“We are irreconcilables!” he howled. “You are impossible, not to be reformed, not to be converted. You are impossible unto death.”

The Ancient Hippie made a downward sign with his arm, and there was a clatter of armament coming alive from every direction. Morgan smashed the Ancient Hippie in the face (an unkind and illegal thing); he fainted and ran like a bolt of rabbits in three directions at once.

“He is a deformity,” Morgan spoke in his churning head about the Ancient Hippie, who still lingered in his mind. “He is perfect in his logic to the system with the central thing left out. There is no meeting ground at all in this life. Impossible, irreconcilable!”

A street-sweeper knows the streets. A moving cat-spring man can get the jump on food-hungry nothoi-hunters. Bullets banged and clattered into wells of buildings, but Morgan had movements that the prediction scopes of the nothoi-hunters’ rifles could not predict. And the hunters really weren’t very good at movement shot, no matter how fancy the wrappings of their colt. Mostly they had hunted down and killed very small children and heavy and distraught women. It was higher sport to bring down a prime man, but they were less practiced at it.

Morgan was away from the first circle of them, going like ragged lightning, striking and vanishing. He sent several of the hunters on their dead way. He seemed always to go toward the inner city, and yet he retreated two steps toward the fringe and the Barrens for every conspicuous step that he took toward the center.

But they were all out after him now. Jazzbo horns sounded to call all hunters. Dogs of the two-legged variety took up the bay after him to trap him or tree him or sound him for the hunters. This was no illegitimate child to be hunted down. It was an illegitimate man, grown and known, illegal and illicit in his tongue and his life. They would have him in their dully murderous way. There was novelty (almost the only remaining one) and diversion in a nothoi-hunt; but there was no heroism, not in the hunters, not even in the prey.

For Morgan Saunders certainly had nothing heroic in him now. He ran sick and scared; he had believed it would be otherwise. He was a man of no special ability or intelligence. He had come to the old central way of

things quite late, and by accident or intuition. He had no magic; he had no plan or program now but to run and evade. He had the unworldly hope and peace, but he hadn't them immediately or vividly as he came to the end; only as buried certainties. He ran himself to weariness. The cat-springs and the movement died in him, and when he could no longer evade and elude, the nothoi-hunters had him and killed him on the edge of the city within sight of the miserable Barrens.

Jane the Crane found him a little later, still in the early morning. She picked him up in sudden strong arms. She walked and keened, carrying the dead Morgan in her arms and the live Ishmael under her belly, wilkeul back into the city and among her flowers, trampling them (which was illegal), shrilling and wailing, a walking forky-tongeed aand agonizing pieta.

Morning crows gathered about her and followed here; and even some of the folks from the regular swing-hours world were up and blinking at the spooky sunlight and the keening woman. They jeered and defamed her, and she came back with her forky tongue and harangued them all.

"Bedamned with you all and the fouled nest of you!" she cried. "You are vermin, you are no longer people. And the Instigators are lice on the body of the world."

And already the Instigators were holding council about her.

"Why not now?" some asked. "She is certainly illegitimate in her conduct, and she carries one illegitimate burden in her arms and one in her belly. Why not now?"

"The hunting has come to be too slim," others of them said. "The nothoi-hunters insist that a small bit of it must be reserved. Here is an additional quarry for them, in two years from now, or at most three. There is prescience about the unborn one. It is sworn that he will be prime game. And the hunters must retain a small reserve."

Another yellow-card street-sweeper, a man very like Morgan Saunders and a friend of his, came by with his working things. With great compassion he took Morgan from Janine's arms, bent him difficultly in the middle, and stuffed him into his wheeled He also spoke some words to Janine in a low voice. We do not know what words they were, but they were like a flame. And now Janine became a new sort of flame.

She brightened, she burned, she erupted with laughter.

What? What? With laughter?



Yes, with laughter and with a quick spate of gay words:

“But why am I mourning like one who doesn’t believe?” she sparked. “It’s the dawn of the world to me! I am a berthing woman, and I will give merriment with my milk. I take the old motto ‘This is the first day of the rest of my life.’ It’s a new dawn, and I have loved the dawns. To be otherwise would be to miss the main things as they have missed them. Hurry, Ishmael, you leaping lump in my belly! We have to get you born and agile before they come to eat us up. But by tomorrow’s morning we will see each other’s faces. God knows the wonder of it, to send births in the early mornings.”

She went to her hidden shanty-room in the ghetto under the ghetto, singing and whistling. Really, she was an odd one in those fl@it False Terminal Days of the world.

(A question, perhaps out of context: Why were those False Terminal Days not truly terminal to the race and the world? O, there were other movements and powers that had not been taken into account. And the plateau, as a matter of fact, that low, level, artificial construction, that been built atop an area of old volcanic and earthquake movement. There was a great underlying fault, and it would erupt there. But this is not an account of termination of the Terminal Stasis.)

3

I’ll climb Sinai’s rocks to the thunder-clad crest  
And learn all that Moses forgot,  
And see if the Bush is at Hebron or Fiest  
And if it is burning or not.  
Archipelago

Here are some pages which possibly do not belong here at all. If that is so, then it is the fault of the randoming machines. This illegal private account of Janine Pervicacia and Morgan Saunders and their illegal issue Ishmael was first composed by a grieving friend and was printed (as everything was printed then) in scatter-print. The unnumbered pages, even of a private journal, had to go through a randoming machine and be randomized; the print machine would not function otherwise. Now, in sorting them out as best we can (for we are reader and not depth-comprehender), a certain section falls together that is not directly a part of the account of Janine and Morgan. Yet this section was mixed up with their account, whether or not it was also written by the hand of the

grieving friend, and it will be given here. We do not know whether this intrusive section is comic or ironic or straight. There is even a chance that it may be a sample of a rare and secret form of the period, a satire upon a satire: an ironic counterpoise of a stereotyped satire form. We nominate this misfit section, “The Interlude of the the Odd Man and the Odd God,” and it is as follows:

“In the early springtime of the year 2040 of the common era, the original sparse population having been removed from the area, three hundred persons of a troubling sort were sealed into the Vale of Paillun, which is in the Knockmealdown Mountains of the Disunited Commonwealth of Ireland. These three hundred persons included certain fossils, diehards, and “yesterday’s leaders” of all irreformable religious and ethic sort, among them the last “Pope” who strangely insisted that he was not the last of them. These three hundred persons, families and singletons, were allowed the sheep and kine of the valley and such primitive tools as they chose to bring in. Seals were set for one thousand years (we do have the historical sense) on both the upper and lower entrances of the valley. All communications with the persons of the vale are evermore prohibited under pain of death. Nothing may go into the vale by earth or by air, and nothing may come out. If there is increase in the valley, then let that increase choke on itself.”

— Joint statement of the United Nations Obsolescence and Terminating Board and of the One Ecumenical Liberal and Secular Church, May 1, 2040.

Matteo Matuitine (Matthew Morning — what kind of a name is that!) who was Pope Paul XIII, had said mass before dawn for the twelve who still adhered to him out of this remnant; they had assisted standing with tapers and rushlights. Then he had brought one flock of sheep (150 of them) up to the high pasture just a little before sunrise. He was a rugged old man and barefoot (for the ground of the vale was holy ground), though it was sharp November. The high grass of this pasture had browned and cured itself where it steel], making winter hay, and the sheep would be kept on such pastures till May when the close-grazed river meadow turned green again. Paul XIII had a hammer, a pestle, and a mattock sort of tool, which the Italians call zappa. He was mending a little stone sheep-bridge over the stream there.

What? Is it odd that a shepherd should herd sheep and that a pontiff

should maintain bridges?

And Paul XIII talked with the Odd God there in the high pasture, as he talked with Him every morning:

“When we first came into this valley (our desert, our prison; our delight if You say it is our delight), we found certain beings here who were more ghost than flesh, who were not on the manifest of the proper fauna of this valley. I had seen such strange half-creatures (neither proper flesh nor yet honest brimstone) in the high mountain valleys of Italy, We always believed them to be the shades of the old supplanted Italic gods and their devotees. But what are we to think when we find them here in Ireland? They are awkward and ungainly and not all there, either in mind or body. You must know of them, for You made them, though they deny it. They are not quite like men, not quite like devils; still less are they like angels. Yet they have some knowledge of the old established things.

“A great shapeless bulk of one such spook ran to me on my first morning in this vale. I could see the dew on the grass sparkling through him; and yet he had substance, for he kicked the rocks about with his big splay feet. He was in torment then, but was not I also in torment? ‘Has Rome fallen?’ he cried out to me in anguish. ‘Is it true that Rome has fallen? Are all the golden walls and towers nung down?’ ‘Yes, fallen,’ I said sadly. ‘Rome had fallen before, but now she falls again in a special way.’ At hearing that it was as if his outsized pumpkin-shaped head broke. His lumpish face cracked and he cried. He went back up into his rocks with a roaring and sobbing like dragons wailing their dead. And some of the stones in this valley also cried out at the news that Rome had fallen.

“What I would like to know, though, is whether we now become as they are. Do we (our remnant here) become like them: not quite like men, not quite like devils, even less like angels? Do we become here no more than ancient haunts, devotees of vanished gods, spooks of the waste places? Assure me that we are more than just one more layer of the stratified fossil formation. Assure me that we will be something more than this, even in our exile.”

The Odd God spoke and assured Paul that they were something more than that. He spoke by a still-green thorn-bush bursting into flame.

Paul XIII spoke again, for only this one Person really listened to him:

“I have a little theory,” said Paul XIII. “The first offense was the taking of the forbidden fruit. The second offense (which I believe is more grievous than the first) is the refusing of the bidden fruit. It is even the hacking down of the tree of the fruit. I believe that all the noisome oddities of the present world are entwined with this refusal and hacking. They kill an entire ecology when they hack down the growth tree. The people starve now in every aspect and do not even know that the name of their unease is starvation, that their pale fever is the starvation fever. Because they have food and ease they do not realize that they starve.

“Did You know that there is no landscape any more in the world? That there are no longer any real rocks or towns out there? Instead there are only weak splotchy pictures of them. A countryside vanishes, and in its place is a poster dizzy with scatter-print that says, ‘This represents a countryside.’ A town goes down, and in its place is a psychedelic blob proclaiming, ‘This stands for a town.’ People are terminated, and in their place are walking spooks with signs around their necks: ‘We are we instead of people.’ In place of life there is narcosis. Hack back the growth enough, and the thing dies. Cut a foot length from the top of a child, and it goes badly with that child. ‘Oh, but the child would grow till he overflowed the world and broke the sky,’ is what they said. ‘How else to regularize the child and the world than to cut off their heads?’ This I believe, is the wrong way.

“But will You not bid the fruit again to us? Offer it. Offer it again and again! In some way that only You understand it will be accepted. Will You not still bid the fruit to fruit?”

A fruity breath; a clear glitter of green leaves; a flash of blossoms that hung and then fell like snow; and a runty dead tree was red with apples. Remember that this was sharp November and the tree had not previously leaved that year.

“You remember the child who found a root and said he would pull it out?” Paul XIII continued. “But when he tried to pull it out, distant people and buildings shriveled and collapsed and were pulled down to nothing and died. The child pulled down the whole world but couldn’t pull out that root. It was a special root; it was the root of everything. And for seven decades now, men have tried to pull out that same root; and instead they have pulled down that same world.

“They did if all to us with catchwords,” Paul continued his morning

conversation. “‘We accept it all,’ they said, ‘except the flesh and blood of it. We are for all these things. We are only against the structure and body of them.’ I had a little joke for the critics who said they loved the Church Itself but hated the Institutional Church. ‘What was the verb that God did about the Church?’ I would ask in my guileless way. ‘He instituted the Church, and therefore it is Institutional.’ But perhaps I cheated a little in my jibe. For the verb that in the Vulgate is instituo is actually in the Greek — but I always forget, You know more Greek than I do. Is it true that there is one construction in the Greek historical optative that is now understood only by the Devil and Yourself? But tell me, are we now in an historical optative time? And what are the options? Will Thou not reveal them to me?”

There were other early and devout men about in the vale. A kaftaned Jew had a stone shed there in the upper pasture where he prepared parchments from sheepskins, and he had set to work now with a low merry chanting. A Hard-Shell from the southern United States was there looking for a lost calf, having left the ninety-nine to find the one (having left them, however, in the careful care of another Hard-Shell). A Mosulman came down from the height of the sealed upper entrance of the valley where he had just performed his morning rites.

The several men looked till and about with a slight impatience. It was time.

“Must You always be reminded?” asked the Hard-Shell.

“We do not even ask the manna which You gave the Fathers,” the kaftaned Jew said.

“Only the plain morning fare of this country,” said Paul XIII.

Quick fire came down on a smoothed stone. And the browned oaten pancakes were there, rampant with ewe butter and honey and aroma. The several men began to eat them.

“I have to laugh at the late line of us from that Paul to this,” Paul XIII reminisced. “I swear that we infuriated the world eleven times in these seven and a half decades. We were all known for our proclivities toward the accommodating secularism, we were all devoted to the soft surrogate thing, we were all intending to voice the easy agreement and be done with it, we were all elected to do so. And then You touched each of our tongues in turn with a burning coal. You think our actions bewildered and angered the world? I tell you that they bewildered ourselves a thousand

times over. How does the speaking horn know what words will be spoken through him? Oh, well, I suppose You have Your reasons, but it has been a little hard on each of us, each being the only transcendent man living in the world in his time.”

Paul XIII ran on with other talk because he was old and garrulous. It was sunlight on the high pastures now and soon the sun would reach down to the depths of the valley. Tinkle bells on the animals filled the air. Kids of sheep and goats and human were everywhere. Women were at work stone-grinding oats and barley. A smith was hammering copper and tin together into orange-colored tools and ornaments. Clipping men were long-clipping sheep. It was sharp November, and the sheep would not be short-clipped again till late spring. The sealed vale in the Knockmealdown Mountains was a busy and burgeoning place.

“I believe that we should have a little of the special this morning,” Paul XIII wheedled. “We can make it ourselves, of course,” he flattered, “but we cannot make it nearly as good as You can. And I have forgotten. I have not so much as brought a pot for it this morning. We can manke pots ourselves of course but we cannot make them anywhere as good as You can.”

There was a sigh in the wind over the vale, almost a sigh of exasperation, if He were capable of exasperation. But of a sudden a three-measure stone crusca-jar stood there, full of the, most extraordinary Wine Ordinary, the blood that ever bled from the earth. And several of them drank of it.

“Leave it off for a while, Paul the Thirteenth,” the Hard-Shell growled. The Hard-Shell only half approved of the extraordinary Wine Ordinary, and he seldom took more than a sip of it. He was stricter than the Odd God but only by a little.

“He has talked to you as to a child, Paul,” the Hard-Shell said, “and it wearies Him after a while, if He could be wearied. It is my turn now. This morning He may talk to me as to a man.”

“I am a child,” said Paul XIII. “I even flatter myself that I am a child of grace”

Then Paul returned to mending the stone slileep-bridge, and the Hard-Shell talked to the Odd God in his own way. And later the kaftaned Jew came and talked to Him, deeply like low music, shivering with fear and quaking with merriment at the same time. Old Jews are said to have

several private jokes between themselves and the Odd God.

And again later the Mosulman came and talked to Him in the desert manner which He especially understands.

They were in odd clutch in that valley of the Knockmealdown Mountains, and it was an Odd God who provided for them.

4

Lo, blessed are our ears for they have heard; Yes, blessed are our eyes for they have seen: Let thunder break on man and beast and bird And the lightning. It is something to have been.

G. K. Chesterton

Jane the Crane had the boy Ishmael born and agile in less time than might be believed. There was a very great hurry now. A baby is vulnerable: not Ishmael, perhaps, but most babies. But he was not born ignorant or uninstructed. For the many months of Janine's carrying him (well, it had been long; he was part monster, surely, and their period is a longer one), she had instructed him all the hours of the day and night, when she was working over her flowers, when gawking about in the street, when abiding in her hidden shanty-room. Especially in the afternoons (these were her nights, when she slept) she instructed him, for they shared the same dreams just as they shared the same blood.

"I tell you, I don't know whether I can hide you better inside or out, she would say to him. "I leave it to you now. Come out when you're ready. You are already bigger than I am. I tell you to get smart fast, to get fast fast. Are you listening to me? You must learn to hide and to disguise. You must learn to look like this one and that one. You will live in the sewers and an the roofs and in the trees. Let me tell you one thing: it is better even to have lived in the dankest agony and fear than never to have lived at all. It is better to be a vermin than never to be anything. It is better to be weird and deformed (I do not mean deformed as the world is deformed now) than to be empty and without form. It is better to be conscious in horror and delirium than to miss consciousness. If you have a nomination and a soul, then nothing else matters greatly, This I believe. If you can hear and understand me, whistle."

And the boy Ishmael always whistled from out of her belly. He always heard and he always understood. Then, when they both realized that it was no longer possible to hide him within, he was born. When they both realized immediately that it would not do to have him newborn and

helpless, he became agile. The open eyes of Ishmael were clouded for only short instants after birth. Then they cleared; he understood; he knew. Nobody ever heard him cry like a human child. He had more sense than that. Sometimes he chirped and whistled like a chimney bird, sometimes he whined like a dog pup. (Dogs, as surrogate to human persons and human affections, were everywhere privileged.) Sometimes Ishmael gurgled like sewer water; but he was always able to communicate — even to communicate without sound.

But where could Ishmael hide? Illegal stories attached to his mother, Jane the Crane. She was watched and followed and checked. All the shanty rooms of the city were searched from time to time by the “rat catchers” who anticipated the nothoi-hunters with the not yet mobile illegals.

Ishmael lived in the sewers and on the roofs and in the trees. But mostly he lived under the floors and in the walls. All the shanties were fifty to eighty years old. Nothing was ever built now, only obbled up a little just before it tumbled clown. Inside the walls was the best place. A young boy not yet able to walk could still climb about inside the walls. And not even the dogs of of the rat-catchers would snuffle him out from them. Ishmael could whine and rattle and yap in the dogs’ own talk. He could pass for a dog in the dark corners, under the floors, inside the walls. When Ishmael seemed like this one or that one, he seemed so to every sense.

But how did Jane the Crane feed him? However did other illegitimate mothers feed their offspring? Oh, there had never been any shortage of food. The swing-time people wasted far more food than they ate. The illegitimate mothers, mostly servile workers to the swingers or morning yellow-card workers, had only to carry leavings home “for the clogs.” It wasn’t starvation that killed the illegal children; it was the “scatter eyes” and the rat-catchers prowling to find and kill them, doing the work voluntarily mostly, from some inner need of theirs.

Ishmael, however, passed all the other illegal children in earliness and agility. He was one of the few authentic geniuses born in the first half of the twenty-first century: thinking like a pot-a-boil before he could talk; reading minds before he could read the simplest scatter-print; imitating animals by sound and scent and movement; imitating legal children by face before he ever saw the reflection of his own face. He was a wild colt



of a boy destined, should he live, to be a wild ass of a man. And he had fame. He was known everywhere before he was seen. Fame is a weed that grows up overnight and can be rooted in anything or nothing.

Some of the nothoi-hunters already talked about the agile Ishmael, possibly before he was ever out of the womb, certainly soon afterward. There was Peeler, a big man among the hunters. There was Slickstock. There was Quickcoiner, a tipster gentleman such as was always a part of a hunter team. These three were now dining together on the popular Chinese dish, egg gone wrong.

“There’s a new one, I tell you!” Peeler gloated and rubbed his long hand together. “I can feel him like a new wind ruffling my hackles. He’s the dog that barks different, he’s the bird that whistles different, he’s the sewer rat that squeaks different. He’s the one of the kind we always hoped for. It will make our season whenever we kill him. The next best thing to killing that seven-year-old male would be to kill this new one.”

“He’s under the streets, he’s in the trees,” said Slickstock, “and I tell you he’s mine! His father killed a teammate of mine at his own hunting-down. How had we missed his father all his years? Where did he come from?”

“This new one is out of Jane the Crane, the forky-tongued flower woman,” Quickcoiner said. “Is she not game yet, now that he is born? Is she not game? Why must we hold off? He is named Ishmael.”

It was known, even before his father came to this city, that there would be a boy named Ishmael.

“But nobody has ever seen this Ishmael,” Peeler said. “We hear him, we sense him, but we do not see him. We know that he is the wild ass of a creature who climbed in the trees and crawled under the streets before he could walk. We know that he dog-sounded and bird-whistled in code before he could talk. We know also that he imitated the talk of our own children before he could talk himself. We do not know his age, though he must be about two years old. But we know that he will be the wildest of them all, even wilder than the seven-year-old male that we have never been able to kill.”

“And we have not been able to get Jane the Crane declared open game,” Slickstock complained. “Tire Instigators claim that there is no evidence of a child. No evidence! Have they no senses except the regular ones?”

When he was three years old, Ishmael slipped off during the swing-hours and got clear to the Barrens where he met the eight-year-old male that the nothoi-hunters had never been able to kill.

So it was all over then, the little drama? The boy had got free and gained his own hunted kind. And whatever happened to the wild children in the Barrens, how they were hunted down and almost extinguished again and again, is surely of another account. Then we are finished with the wild boy Ishmael?

No. He didn't stay in the Barrens. He came back to Janine's slanty room in the ghetto under the ghetto, back to the sewers and the spaces in the walls and under the floors and streets, back to the trees.

Three swing-periods later, Ishmael got clear to the Barrens again, taking another small boy with him. It was harder with another boy (though Ishmael had instructed him well) and they made it barely. They ran atangle of a set of nothoi-hunters (not the Peeler set, however), not a quick-sensing set that know there was an Ishmael. But the wild-ass boy had a shot lodged behind his ear just where his wiry mane rose highest. He left it there for memento though it festered him. He received this shot in memory of his father, who hadn't been able to leave him anything tangible.

Three swing periods later, Ishmael got clear to the Barrens again, taking three small boys with him. This incursion was without incident. He repeated the feat after the same interval. Then he repeated it again. It took him about three days to instruct and train the children properly. Many two- and three- and four-year-old children are slow learners and inattentive, though Ishmael selected only the most promising of them to smuggle to the Barrens.

Then they had their first fatalities. During one of their swing-period journeys they ran atangle of a set of nothoi-hunters, and this was the Peeler set; this was the quick-sensing set that knew there was an Ishmael. Four of the six boys that Ishmael was leading were killed, and both of the girls. Ishmael cursed Peeler and his cronies.

Ishmael had taken a hundred children into the Barrens, and the rampant eight-year-old male who ruled the region now had real material for his talents. Then Peeler led an incursion into the Barrens that killed fifty young nothoi. It was announced (as it had been announced many times before) that the young nothoi in the Barrens had now been

extinguished. But they hadn't been.

Ishmael led another hundred children into the Barrens over a period of some weeks. But seven incursions, the last one led by the notorious Peeler again, killed seventy of the Barrens nothoi. Ishmael was not four years old. Is not a wild ass full grown at three? He had cursed Peeler before, and the cursing hadn't been effective. "I will do something else. I will get him where it hurts him," Ishmael said.

Peeler had a little boy, older than Ishmael but about the same size. Ishmael knew this. Ishmael knew everything.

Ishmael found the little boy, Onlyborn Peeler, struck him down wildly, and stripped him naked. Then he changed clothes with him. Thereupon, he made himself to look exactly like that little Peeler boy. How could he have done it, with the wild-ass crine standing up on his head and neck like that? With the wild eyes rolling around in his head the way they did? With the hands and feet that were too big for him, with the ass-sprits (which were like the cat-springs of his father) in his steps, with the sloping shoulders and haunches on him that the little Peeler boy didn't have? Well hokey, he wasn't even the same color as the Peeler boy!

Well, he did it. Ishmael was hypnotic. He drew eyes to him or away from him as he wished. He made those hypnotized eyes see what he wanted them to see. He could make his face look like anything he decided. "Why, I almost peeled you for a potato!" Jane the Crane had said to him once. "Why are you looking like a potato?" He had the face of the little Peeler boy now and the Peeler boy's clothes. He went and found Peeler himself, sitting with Slickstock and Quickcoiner.

"Hey, Pop, get on the op!" he spoke boldly to Peeler, using the voice of the Peeler boy and the kind of talk that legal kids talked. He put his eye to the barrel of Peeler's giin and looked down it.

"What is the matter with you, Onlyborn? Why do you look so funny? What are you doing here? Why aren't you in kindergarten?" Peeler asked Ishmael with rising anger.

"Peeler, I never realized that your kid looked so funny," said Quickcoiner, "and looking from him to you, I never realized that you looked so funny either."

"Got him easy, got him hard, got him dead in our own backyard," Ishmael chanted in the little Peeler boy voice.

"Talk sense, or got out of here and back to school," Peeler ordered.

“Peeler!” Slickstock roared, rising, “Let’s go see! If somebody’s dead, we want to know why we didn’t get to kill him. Maybe somebody else has been potting our game.”

Ishmael was running toward the Peeler house, and the three big nothoi-hunters were clattering after him to see who was dead.

“Who is it, Onlyborn, who is dead?” Peeler was calling after Ishmael, still thinking he was his own son.

“On the op, Pop, see the fish,” Ishmael chanted as he ran, “all laid out and his name is Ish.”

“Ishmael!” Peeler roared like a wounded boar. “Somebody has stolen Ishmael from us.”

“Ishmael!” Slickstock shouted. “We’ve been robbed. He was our assigned kill.”

“Ishmael!” Quickcoiner shrieked. “I’ll have coin back from the tipsters. They assured me he could never be caught in the city.”

Ishmael pointed when they came to the body. Then he faded back through the big nothoi-hunters and was into the trees. He was in the near trees for a moment, till he should see how the hunters carried on, but ready to be into the far trees as soon as these big men realized what had happened.

“Ishmael!” Peeler agonized as he bent over the little body where Ishmael had struck it down. “Wait, men, wait!” he said then. “Why, this can’t be Ishmael at all! This is my little boy Onlyborn who is dead here. This is the funniest thing I ever heard of. What do you make of it, fellows?” )Peeler didn’t particulary car for his small son. The kid-card and the kid [for prestige] had put him into hock for years>)

“But since this is little Onlyborn” — Quickcoiner hesitated — “then who was —?”

“Ishmael!” Slickstock roared. “It was himself! He tricked us! He bearded the lions in our own jaws. We’ll have him, we’ll have him! He’s our kill!”

“Coin out of my hand,” Quickcoiner cried. “I’ll overdraw. I’ll get every tipster in town on this. We’re tricked. We’ll get him, we’ll get him fast.”

“I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him,” Peeler jabbered. “Made fools of us! Looked right down my giin. Insulted us. Something else. Yeah, he killed my boy. I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him.”

It hadn’t quite fallen is Ishmael (now in the far trees) had figured. He

hadn't gotten Peeler where it hurt him in killing his son, Onlyborn, and this puzzled Ishmael. But he had got him where it hurt him in tricking him, in making a fool out of him. It had been to the death between them before. Now it was triply so.

Quickcoiner poured out money to the tipsters, and they began to hem Ishmael in, so they thought. Peeler and Ishmael declared the special game of his set.

But there was enough hunting for all the nothoi-hunter sets now. A dozen other wild-ass kids were working in the city, instructed by Ishmael himself and by the intrepid nine-year-old male that the nothoi-hunters had never been able to kill. And new Barrens-like places were already being used: a skimpy little region called the Potato Hills, a swampy stretch called the Deadwood Bottoms. And the wild-ass kids were breaking out all over the world; wilder than they had been before, clonkey-smart now, long-eared for rumor and news, mule-strong, jenny-fleet, hoof-liard, rebels, misbegottens, Issachars, asses indeed. They even used the sinister-barred bray for signal now and for mockery. The left-handed brotherhood had rampaged before, and it refused to believe now that it was extinguished.

But the nothoi-hunters also came on stronger now, more professional, better provided, better intelingenced, more adaptably armed. Every new evasion tactic that the nothoi kids discovered was soon the property of the prediction scopes of the hunters' rifles.

Ishmael had run other branches of illegitimate kids into the Barrens and the Bottoms and the Potato Hills. Then it came to his another, (who had powers) that he had run his way; to whichever end, she did not know.

"You have run to the end of the line in this," she said. "You are already too big to crawl in many of the walls and under many of the floors and streets. The crawl spaces are only suited for very small children. You are too big to be passed over by the sharp eyes, you are too big to vanish absolutely. You will die on your next incursion; or you will get through to the wilds a last time and remain there to be a male in the Barrens or the Bottoms. There is no plan, there has never been any plan except to live: that everybody be allowed to live once — a little while at least. To have been is to be forever. But never to have been is to be nothing."

"Oh, we make plans, the nine-year-old male and I. But they close in on us more and kill more of us every time. And we run out of tricks and

dodges and evasions. The prediction scopes on their guns know them all. They know when we will break pace, when we will cut back, even before we know it.”

“There is one trick that they don’t know, Ishmael of the high crine and the wobbly eyes,” Jane the Crane said. “If you are trapped for the last time, run straight. The scopes will not understand it, and the hunter-men will not understand it. Run a straight line that last time. The very idea of a straight line has vanished from this world.”

Quickcoiner had poured more money to the tipsters. Slickstock had organized beaters. Peeler had led incursions into the Barrens and Bottoms and Hills that had left those refuges torn to pieces.

Ishmael could tell by the tint of the streams in the mornings how many had died in the Barrens the night before.

“It is the last day,” Jane the Crane told Ishmael now. “Not the last day for you, maybe. Not the last day for me, maybe. But the last day for us. I knew which was the last day I would have with your father. I know this is the last day I will have you. Whatever I have done I have done. Now it is time that I do it again.”

After that, Ishmael went on incursion and got through with a good pack of kids. He got back just in the closing hours of swing-time and found that every entrance to every burrow was spotted and guarded and closed to him. He could smell the hunters smell ing him. He could sense their sensors.

He heard also that his mother Jane the Crane had now been declared open game. He was trapped and angry. He was an animal-smart six-year-old boy of the species that had once been human, that might again be human after its freakish interlude. He was a towering and intelingent example of that species which was being hewn to death in its best, in its left-handed blood.

He was blocked in, he was sighted, he took to the trees. This city (thanks for all green and growing favors) had preserved its trees. But the trees did not reach all the way to the Barrens. They did not, but they reached to —

Too late! He sniciled the trip wire, of course, but he could not avoid tripping it, not at the speed he was going. And he hadn’t expected a sky trap, a treetop trap. He had never encountered such before. But the tipsters had gathered information on Ishmael’s every route, even his

routes through the high trees.

There was a searing and acrid explosion. There was a ballooning wave of green fragments and gray-brown bark branches, and there was a sudden gap in the sky where there had been foliage. Ishmael, broken and burned considerably, fell to the street out of that sudden gap in the sky. Communication crackled, and three sets of nothoi-hunters converged on the boy. Peeler was barking that it was his kill and the other sets should desist.

Ishmael, dazed and bloodied, rose out of the green trash that covered him and began to run in the direction of the Barrens. He ran in a straight line. The short-range rifles began to cough at him; they were mostly from Peeler's set. One set of hunters did desist. Another set was firing crazily. It almost seemed as if men were firing at Peeler and Slickstock and Quickcoiner. There were confused and angry cries and the barking of weapons, but Ishmael ran on, straight as a lance and untouched; ran on under the last of these trees, under the open sky, toward distant trees again, on and on.

The prediction scopes of the hunters' rifles simply could not handle a straight-line trail. Nothing in their data or in their world gave information on this ultimate evasion tactic. The scope on Peeler's own gun failed in frustration and smoke, and the other scopes glowed red in malfunction and failure.

It seemed that Ishmael might make it through clear again, to trees, to escape, to the Barrens. He didn't. A ricochet shot killed him there, no more than a dozen bounds from the skirting woods. He bunched and fell; he looked half animal, half child, as he curled into a small ball and died quickly.

There was Peeler's barking laugh of triumph; then a quick flash out of those skirting trees sawed it in half. Something had dived down from those trees, too swift for free fall. The something had hit, rolled, scurried, run, and swooped to the curled-up ball that was the dead boy Ishmael. The something had Ishmael (knowing that he was dead), bounded with him while the fury howl and fast clatter of bullets came from at least two sets of hunters, reached the skirting trees with the burden, and bounded up a trunk like a giant squirrel. Perhaps the apparition got away clear, perhaps not. The trees were almost bowed over with the blow of automatic nearer weapons.

It had been the ten-year-old male from the Barrens who had come and snatched the body of Ishmael from under the noses of the the guns. For what? He himself knew that Ishamel was already dead. He himself had taught Ishmael never to waste time on a dead one. For what then?

For heroism. He did not know that heroism was already dead. He believed that he could establish a mystique and a tomb.

Half a dozen sets of hunters were now after the young male and his dead burden. Not the set of Peeler, however. Peeler's set had got its kill, though by accident. It wanted more of the same blood, and it had one more prey assigned to it as open game.

"Where's the mother?" Peeler howled. "We may as well have double party today," Slickstock exulted. "Tipsters, tipsters, where is the leggy one?" Qtiickcoiner screeched.

But Jane the Crane had already rushed out, wailing and keening:

"Oh my son, Oh my son!" she cried. "Oh my son, come back to me!"

Somehow that didn't sound like Jane the Crane's way of carrying on.

But shots sang out. Janine went rigid in spread agony; she fell at full length; she spilled out gore, quivered, and was quiet.

The shots had not come from the unready guns of Peeler's set.

They had come, apparently, from another set of hunters down a side street. There was an afterbtirst of firing from there also; again it almost seemed as if someone was shooting it Peeler's set. Peeler and his associates took cover, confused by the dangerous random firing, happy that Ishmael and his mother had been killed, somewhat morbid that they themselves had not done all the killing.

(Check it, sensors, check it. Is there something tricky about all this? — No. It appears quite authentic.)

Janine Pervicaia lay in her gore in the open street, and a yellow-card street-sweeper came dutifully to dispose of her. Slain illegal women were common enough, of course; but Janine was uncommonly comely and loggy, and many eyes were on her. This had to be done carefully, and she herself was not very careful now. But what would it matter, when she was already slain?

Slain? She was not slain. She wasn't touched. She hadn't lived with Morgan that long, she hadn't lived with Ishmael that long, to be killed in the open street, and for nothing. But it is good to have "Dead" written on your record and have it closed when it has gotten out of hand. Perhaps



one can become another person with another records or with none.

The yellow-card street-sweeper (who looked very like Morgan Saunders and had been friend of him) did indeed gather Janine up as if she were dead, bending her difficultly in the middle and stuffing her into his wheeled canister. Quite a bit of her still stuck out; she was pretty leggy. But there had been signal between Jane the Crane and the sweeper, and perhaps illegal communication had also been held with others.

The gore that had spilled out in the street was not Jane's own. Many of the illegal birthing women now carried gore with them for just such eventualities as this. (And there were more and more of them now in the ghetto that is under the ghetto; there were more and more of their issue getting through to the various Barrens to set up kids' kingdoms. For already the Plateau had begun to tremble with its great underlying fault. Earthquake and Volcano and Upheaval!)

"Is it Agar again, or is it the Jane?" the trundling sweeper asked softly to the inside of his canister. "No, no, do not sing and whistle, or softly if you do. That's enough to make any canister suspect."

Jane the Crane had lost her man, the dashing street-sweeper from over the sea. She had lost her son Ishmael, the incandescent wild colt of a boy. But she sang and whistled (doubled up as she was in the canister) gaily but so low that only her new sweeper-man could hear her.

She'd do it again — and again. She would be a birthing woman once more. And once more she would give merriment with her milk.

## NOR LIMESTONE ISLANDS

A lapidary is one who cuts, polishes, engraves, and sets small stones. He is also a scrivener with a choppy style who sets in little stones or pieces here and there and attempts to make a mosaic out of them.

But what do you call one who cuts and sets very large stones?

Take a small lapillus or stone for instance:

The origin of painting as an art in Greece is connected with definite historical personages; but that of sculpture is lost in the mists of legend. Its authentic history does not begin until about the year B.C. 600. It was regarded as an art imparted to men by the gods; for such is the thought expressed in the assertion that the earliest statues fell from heaven.

— “Statuana Ars; Sculpture,” — Harper’s Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities.

We set that little stone in one corner, even though it at, contains a misunderstanding of what fell from heaven: it wasn’t finished statues.

Then we set another small stone:

(We haven’t the exact citation of this. It’s from Charles Fort or from one of his imitators.) It’s of a scientist who refused to believe that several pieces of limestone had fallen from the sky, even though two farmers had seen them fall. They could not have fallen from the sky, the scientist said, because there is no limestone in the sky. (What would that scientist have done if he had been confronted with the question of Whales in the Sky?)

We set that little stone of wisdom into one corner. And we look around for other stones to set.

The limestone salesman was making his pitch to the city commissioners. He had been making a poor pitch and he was a poor salesman. All he had was price (much less than one tenth that of the other bidders) and superior quality. But the limestone salesman did not make a good appearance. He was bare-chested (and colossally deep-chested). He had only a little shoulder jacket above, and a folded drape below. On his feet he had the crepida or Hermes-sandals, made of buckskin apparently: a silly affectation. He was darkly burnt in skin and hair, but the roots of his hair and of his skin indicated that he was blond in both. He was golden-bearded, but the beard (and in fact the whole man) was covered with chalk-dust or rock-dust. The man was sweaty, and he smelled. His was a composite smell of limestone and edged bronze and goats and

clover and honey and ozone and lentils and sour milk and dung and strong cheese.

“No, I don’t believe that we want to deal with you at all,” the mayor of the city was saying. “The other firms are all reputable and long established.”

“Our firm is long established,” the limestone salesman said.

“It has been doing business from the same - ah — cart for nine thousand years.” “Balderdash,” the streets and sewers commissioner swore. “You won’t even give us the address of your firm, and you haven’t put in a formal bid.”

“The address is Stutzamutza,” the limestone salesman said. “That’s all the address I can give you. There isn’t any other address. And I will put in a formal bid if you will show me how to do it. I offer you three hundred tons of the finest marble-limestone, cut exactly to specification, and set in place, guaranteed to take care of your project, guaranteed to be without flaw, in either pure white or variegated; I offer this delivered and set within one hour, all for the price of three hundred dollars or three hundred bushels of cracked corn.”

“Oh take it, take it!” a Miss Phosphor McCabe cried out. “We elect you gentlemen to do our business for us at bargain prices. Do not pass up this fine bargain, I beg you.” Phosphor McCabe was a lady photographer who had nine fingers in every pie.

“You be quiet, young lady, or we will have you put out of the hearing room,” said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. “You will wait your turn, and you will not interfere in other cases. I shudder to think what your own petition will be today. Was ever a group so put upon by cranks as ourselves?”

“You have a very bad reputation, man,” the finance commissioner said to the limestone salesman, “insofar as anyone has heard of you before. There is some mumble that your limestone or marble is not substantial, that it will melt away like hailstones. There is even a rumor that you had something to do with the terrible hailstorm of the night before last.”

“Ah, we just had a little party at our place that night,” the limestone salesman said. “We had a few dozen bottles of Tontitown wine from some stone that we set over in Arkansas, and we drank it up. We didn’t hurt anybody or anything with those hailstones. Hey, some of them were as big as basketballs, weren’t they! But we were careful where we let them

fall. How often do you see a hailstorm as wild as that that doesn't do any damage at all to anything?"

"We can't afford to look silly," the schools and activities commissioner said. "We have been made to look silly in quite a few cases lately, not all of them our own fault. We can't afford to buy limestone for a project like this from someone like you."

"I wonder if you could get me about a hundred and twenty tons of good quality pink granite?" asked a smiling pinkish man in the hearing room.

"No, that's another island entirely," the limestone salesman said. "I'll tell them if I see them."

"Mr. Chalupa, I don't know what your business is here today," the mayor said severely to the smiling pinkish man, "but you will wait your turn, and you will not mix into this case. Lately it seems that our open hearings are just one nut after another."

"How can you lose?" the limestone salesman asked the commissioners. "I will supply and cut and set the stones. If you are not satisfied, I will leave the stones at no cost, or I will remove them again. And not until you are completely satisfied do you pay me the three hundred dollars or the three hundred bushels of cracked corn."

"I want to go to your country with you," Miss Phosphor McCabe burst out. "I am fascinated by what I have heard of it. I want to do a photographic article about it for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. How far away is your country now?"

"All right," the limestone salesman said. "I'll wait for you. We'll go just as soon as I have transacted my business and you have transacted yours. We like everybody and we want everybody to come and visit us, but hardly anybody wants to. Right now, my country is about three miles from here. Last chance, gentlemen: I offer you the best bargain in quality marble-limestone that you'll ever find if you live two hundred years. And I hope you do all live to be two hundred. We like everybody and we'd like to see everybody live two hundred years at least."

"Absolutely not," said the mayor of the city. "We'd be the laughing-stock of the whole state if we did business with someone like you. What kind of a country of yours are you talking about that's only three miles from here? Absolutely not. You are wasting your time and ours, man."

"No, no, it just couldn't be," said the streets and sewers commissioner.

“What would the papers print if they heard that we had bought limestone from somebody nearly as disreputable as a saucerian?”

“Rejected, rejected,” said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. “We were elected to transact the city’s business with economy and dignity.”

“Ah well, all right,” the limestone salesman said. “You can’t sell a stylobate every time you try. Good day, commissioners. No hurry, lady. I’ll wait for you.” And the limestone salesman went out, leaving, as it seemed, a cloud of rock-dust in his wake.

“What a day!” the schools and activities commissioner moaned. “What a procession of jokers we have had! Anyhow, that one can’t be topped.”

“I’m not so sure,” the mayor grumbled. “Miss Phosphor McCabe is next.”

“Oh, I’ll be brief,” Phosphor said brightly. “All I want is a permit to build a pagoda on that thirty-acre hill that my grandfather left me. It won’t interfere with anything. There won’t be any utilities to run to it. And it will be pretty.”

“Ah, why do you want to build a pagoda?” the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

“So I can take pictures of it. And just because I want to build a pagoda.”

“What kind of a pagoda will it be?” the parks and playgrounds commissioner asked.

“A pink pagoda.”

“How big will it be?” the schools and activities commissioner asked.

“Thirty acres big. And four hundred feet high. It will be high and it won’t bother anything.”

“Why do you want it so big?” the mayor asked.

“So it will be ten times as big as the Black Pagoda in India. It’ll be real pretty and an attraction to the area.”

“Do you have the money to build this with?” the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

“No, I don’t have hardly any money. If I sell my photographic article “With Camera and Canoe on Sky-High Stutzamutza” to the Heritage Geographical Magazine. I will get some money for it. And I have been snapping unrehearsed camera portraits of all you gentlemen for the last few minutes, and I may be able to sell them to Comic Weekly if I can

think of cute headings for them. As to the money to build the Pink Pagoda, oh, I'll think of something."

"Miss McCabe, your request is remanded or remaindered or whatever, which is the same thing as being tabled," the mayor said.

"What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure. The legal commissioner is absent today, but he always says something like that when we want to pass the buck for a little while."

"It means come back in one week, Miss McCabe," the streets and sewers commissioner said.

"All right," Miss Phosphor McCabe agreed. "I couldn't possibly start on the Pink Pagoda before a week anyhow."

And now we set this odd-shaped stone over in the other corner:

The seventeenth century discovery of the Polynesian Islands by common seamen was one of the ancient paradise promises fulfilled. The green islands, the blue sea, the golden beaches and the golden sunlight, the dusky girls! Fruit incomparable, fish incomparable, roast pig and baked bird beyond believing, breadfruit and volcano, absolute and continuing perfection of weather, brown-skin paradise maidens such as are promised in alcoran, song and string-music and surf-music! This was the Promised Paradise of the Islands, and it came true.

But even this was a weak thing beside the less known, the earlier and continuing discovery of the Floating Islands (or the Travertine Islands) by more intrepid farers. The girls of the Floating Islands are lighter (except for the cool blacks on the Greenstone Dolomites) than the Polynesian maidens; they are more intelligent and much more full of fun; are more handsome and fuller-bodied; are of an artier and more vital culture. They are livelier. Oh how they are livelier! And the regions themselves defy description. For color and zest, there is nothing in Polynesia or Aegea or Antilla to compare at all. And all the Travertine people are so friendly! Perhaps it is well that they are little known and little visited. We may be too weak for their experience.

Facts of the Paradise Legend by Harold Bluewater.

Look closely at that little stone ere we leave it. Are you sure that you have correctly noted the shape of it?

Then a still smaller stone to be set in, here where there seems too empty a little gap. It's a mere quotation:

"In Lapidary Inscription a Man is not upon Oath." — Doctor Johnson.

Miss Phosphor McCabe did visit the limestone salesman 5 country, and she did do the photographic article "With Camera and Canoe in Sky-High Stutzamutza." The stunning, eye-blowing, heart-swelling, joy-filled color photography cannot be given here, but these are a few extracts from the sustaining text:

"Stutzamutza is a limestone land of such unbelievable whiteness as to make the eyes ache with delight. It is this super-whiteness as a basis that makes all the other colors stand out with such clarity. There cannot be anywhere a bluer sky than, for most of the hours and days, surrounds Stutzamutza (see plates I and II). There cannot be greener fields, where there are fields, nor more silvery water (plates IV and V). The waterfalls are absolute rainbows, especially Final Falls, when it flows clear off the high land (plate VI). There cannot be more variegated cliffs, blue, black, pink, ochre, red, green, but always with that more-white-than-white basic (plate VII). There cannot be such a sun anywhere else. It shines here as it shines nowhere on the world.

"Due to the high average elevation of Stutzamutza (there will be some boggled eyes when I reveal just what I do mean by the average elevation of this place), the people are all wonderfully deep-chested or deep-breasted. They are like something out of fable. The few visitors who come here from lower, from more mundane elevations, are uniform in their disbelief. 'Oh, oh,' they will say. 'There can't be girls like that.' There are, however (see plate VIII). 'How long has this been going on?' these occasional visitors ask. It has been going on for the nine thousand years of recorded Stutzamutza history; and, beyond that, it has been going on as long as the world has been going on.

"Perhaps due to their deep-breastedness the Stutzamutza people are superb in their singing. They are lusty, they are loud, they are beautiful and enchanting in this. Their instruments, besides the conventional flutes and bagpipes (with their great lung-power, these people do wonderful things with the bagpipes) and lyric harps and tabors, are the thunder-drum (plate IX) and the thirteen-foot-long trumpets (plates X and XI). It is doubted whether any other people anywhere would be able to blow these roaring trumpets.

"Perhaps it is due also to their deep-breastedness that the Stutzamutza people are all so lustily affectionate. There is something both breath-taking and breath-giving in their Olympian carnality. They have a

robustness and glory in their man and woman interfluents that leave this underdeveloped little girl more than amazed (plates X to XIX). Moreover, these people are witty and wise, and always pleasant.

“It is said that originally there was not any soil at all on Stutzamutza. The people would trade finest quality limestone, marble, and dolomite for equal amounts of soil, be it the poorest clay or sand. They filled certain crevices with this soil and got vegetation to begin. And, in a few thousand years, they built countless verdant terraces, knolls and valleys. Grapes, olives and clover are now grown in profusion. Wine and oil and honey gladden the deep hearts of the people. The wonderful blue-green clover (see plate XX) is grazed by the bees and the goats. There are two separate species of goat, the meadow and pasture goat kept for its milk and cheese and mohair, and the larger and wilder mountain goat hunted on the white crags and eaten for its flavorsome, randy meat. Woven mohair and dressed buckskin are used for the Stutzamutza clothing. The people are not voluminously clothed, in spite of the fact that it becomes quite chilly on the days when the elevation suddenly increases.

“There is very little grain grown on Stutzamutza. Mostly, quarried stones are bartered for grain. Quarrying stone is the main industry, it is really the only one on Stutzamutza. The great quarries in their cutaways sometimes reveal amazing fossil deposits. There is a complete fossilized body of a whale (it is an extinct Zeuglodon or Eocene Whale) (see plate XXI). “If this is whale indeed, then this all must have been under ocean once,” I said to one of my deep-chested friends. “Oh certainly,” he said, “nowhere else is limestone formed than in ocean.” “Then how has it risen so far above it?” I asked. “That is something for the Geologists and the Hyphologists to figure out,” my friend said.

“The fascinating aspect of the water on Stutzamutza is its changeableness. A lake is sometimes formed in a single day, and it may be emptied out in one day again by mere tipping. The rain is prodigious sometimes, when it is decided to come into that aspect. To shoot the rapids on the sudden swollen rivers is a delight. Sometimes ice will form all over Stutzamutza in a very few minutes. The people delight in this sudden ice, all except the little under-equipped guest. The beauty of it is stupendous; so is its cold. They shear the ice off in great sheets and masses and blocks, and let it fall for fun.

“But all lesser views are forgotten when one sees the waterfalls



tumbling in the sunlight. And the most wonderful of all of them is Final Falls. Oh to watch it fall clear off Stutzamutza (see plate XXII), to see it fall into practically endless space, thirty thousand feet, sixty thousand feet, turning into mist, into sleet or snow or rain or hail depending on the sort of day it is, to see the miles-long rainbow of it extending to the vanishing point so far below your feet!

“There is a particularly striking pink marble cliff toward the north end of the land (the temporary north end of the land). ‘You like it? You can have it,’ my friends say. That is what I had been fishing for them to say.

Yes, Miss Phosphor McCabe did the really stunning photographic article for Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage Geographical did not accept it, however. Miss Phosphor McCabe had arrived at some unacceptable conclusions, the editor said.

“What really happened is that I arrived at an unacceptable place,” Miss Phosphor said. “I remained there for six days. I photographed it and I narrated it.”

“Ah, we’d never get by with that,” the editor said. Part of the trouble was Miss Phosphor McCabe’s explanations of just what she did mean by the average elevation of Stutzamutza (it was quite high), and by “days of increasing elevation.”

Now here is another stone of silly shape. At first glimpse, it will not seem possible to fit it into the intended gap. But the eye is deceived: this shape will fit into the gap nicely. It is a recollection in age of a thing observed during a long lifetime by a fine weather eye.

Already as a small boy I was interested in clouds. I believed that certain clouds preserve their identities and appear again and again; and that some clouds are more solid than others.

Later, when I took meteorology and weather courses at the university, I had a classmate who held a series of seemingly insane beliefs. At the heart of these was the theory that certain apparent clouds are not vapor masses at all but are floating stone islands in the sky. He believed that there were some thirty of these islands, most of them composed of limestone, but some of them of basalt or sandstone, even of shale. He said that one, at least, of them was composed of pot-stone or soap-stone.

This classmate said that these floating islands were sometimes large, one of them being at least five miles long: that they were intelligently

navigated to follow the best camouflage, the limestone islands usually traveling with masses of white fleecy clouds, the basalt islands traveling with dark thunder-heads, and so on. He believed that these islands sometimes came to rest on earth, that each of them had its own several nests in unfrequented regions. And he believed that the floating islands were peopled.

We had considerable fun with Mad Anthony Tummley, our eccentric classmate. His ideas, we told each other, were quite insane. And, indeed, Anthony himself was finally institutionalized. It was a sad case, but one that could hardly be discussed without laughter.

But later, after more than fifty years in the weather profession, I have come to the conclusion that Anthony Tummley was right in every respect. Several of us veteran weathermen share this knowledge now, but we have developed a sort of code for the thing, not daring to admit it openly, even to ourselves. 'Whales in the Sky' is the code-name for this study, and we pretend to keep it on a humorous basis.

Some thirty of these floating stone islands are continuously over our own country (there may be more than a hundred of them in the world). They are tracked on radar; they are sighted again and again in their slightly changed forms (some of them, now and then, seem to slough off small masses of stone and deposit it somehow on earth); they are known, they are named.

They are even visited by some persons of odd character: always a peculiar combination of simplicity, acceptance, intelligence and strange rapport. There are persons and families in rural situations who employ these peopled islands to carry messages and goods for them. In rural and swampland Louisiana, there was once some wonder that the people did not more avail themselves of the Intercoastal Canal barges to carry their supplies, and their products to market. 'How are the barges better than the stone islands that we have always used?' these people ask. 'They aren't on a much more regular schedule, they aren't much faster, and they won't give you anything like the same amount of service in exchange for a hundredweight of rice. Besides that, the stone-island people are our friends, and some of them have intermarried with us Gajuns.' There are other regions where the same easy cooperation obtains.

Many of the stone-island people are well known along certain almost regular routes. These people are all of a powerful and rather coarse

beauty. They are good-natured and hearty. They actually traffic in stone, trading amazing tonnages of top grade building stone for grain and other simple provisions.

There is no scientific explanation at all of how these things can be, how the stone islands are able to float in the sky. But that they do so is the open secret of perhaps a million persons.

Really, I am now too wealthy to be put in a mad-house (though I made my money in a rather mad traffic which would not be generally believed). I am too old to be laughed at openly: I will merely be smiled at as an eccentric. I have now retired from that weather profession which served me as a front for many years (which profession, however, I loved and still love).

I know what I know. There are more things in the zone fifteen miles above the earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.

— Memories of 52 Years as a Weather Observer by Hank Fairday (Privately printed 1970).

Miss Phosphor McCabe did another really stunning photo-graphic article for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. It had a catchy title: “All Right, Then You Tell Me How I Did It, or The Building of the Pink Pagoda.”

“The Pink Pagoda is complete, except for such additions as shall have made whenever the notion strikes me, and whenever my high-flying friends are in the neighborhood. It is by far the largest structure in the world and also, in my n opinion, the most beautiful. But it is not massive in appearance: it is light and airy. Come see it in the stone, all of you! Come see it in the color photography (plates I to CXXIX) if you are not able to come yourself. This wonderful structure gives the answers to hundreds of questions, if you will just en your eyes and your ears.

“Of ancient megalithic structures it has sometimes been asked how a hundred or more of one hundred ton blocks of stone could have been piled up, and fitted so carefully that even a knife-blade could not be inserted between the blocks. It’s easy. You usually don’t set a hundred one hundred ton blocks, unless for a certain ornamentation. You set one ten thousand ton block, and the joinings are merely simulated. In the Pink Pagoda I have had set blocks as heavy as three hundred thousand tons of pink limestone (see plate XXI).

“They bring the whole island down in place. They split off what block

is wanted at that location (and, believe me, they are some splitters); then they withdraw the island a little bit and leave the block in place.

“Well, how else was it done? How did I get the one hundred and fifty thousand ton main capstone in place four hundred and fifty feet in the air? With ramps? Oh stop it, you’ll scare the cuckoos. The stone pillars and turrets all around and below it are like three-dimensional lace-work, and that main capstone had to go on last. It wasn’t done by rocking it up on ramps, even if there had been a place for the ramps. It was all done on one Saturday afternoon, and here are the sequence pictures showing just how it was done. It was done by using a floating island, and by detaching pieces of that island as it was floated into place. I tell you that there is no other way that a one hundred and five pound girl can assemble a thirty million ton Pink Pagoda in six hours. She has got to have a floating island, with a north cliff of pink limestone, and she has got to be very good friends with the people on that island.

“Please come and see my Pink Pagoda. All the people and all the officials avert their eyes from it. They say that it is impossible that such a thing could be there, and therefore it cannot be there. But it is there. See it yourself (or see plates IV, IX, XXXIII, LXX especially). And it is pretty (see plates XIX, XXIV, V, LIV). But best, come see it as it really is.”

Miss Phosphor McCabe did that rather astonishing photographic article for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage Geographical refused to publish it, though, stating that such things were impossible. And they refused to come and see the Pink Pagoda itself, which is a pity, since it is the largest and most beautiful structure on earth.

It stands there yet, on that thirty acre hill right on the north edge of town. And you have not heard the last stone of it yet. The latest, a bad-natured little addition, will not be the last: Miss Phosphor swears that it will not be.

There was a flimsy-winged enemy flew down, shortly after the first completion of the pagoda, and set the latest very small stone (it is called the egg-of-doubt stone) on top of the main capstone. ‘Twas a crabbed written little stone, and it read:

“I will not trow two-headed calves,”  
Say never-seens, and also haves.  
“I’ll not believe a hollow earth,”  
Say seepicals of doubtful birth.

“I’ll not concede Atlantis you,  
“Nor yet Lemuria or Mu,  
“Nor woodsmen in northwestern lands,  
“Nor bandy-legg’d saucerians,  
“Nor ancient technologic myth,  
“Nor charm of timeless megalith.  
“I will not credit Whales that fly,  
“Nor Limestone Islands in the Sky.”

Unfolk Ballad

That crabby little ballad-stone on the top almost spoils the Pink Pagoda for me. But it will be removed, Miss Phosphor McCabe says, just as soon as her traveling friends are back in this neighborhood and she can get up there. That is all that we have to say on the subject of stone setting.

Does anyone else have something further to add?

## SKY

The Sky-Seller was Mr. Furtive himself, fox-muzzled, ferret-eyed, slithering along like a snake, and living under the Rocks. The Rocks had not been a grand place for a long time. It had been built in the grand style on a mephitic plot of earth (to transform it), but the mephitic earth had won out. The apartments of the Rocks had lost their sparkle as they had been divided again and again, and now they were shoddy. The Rocks had weathered. its once pastel hues were now dull grays and browns.

The five underground levels had been parking places for motor vehicles when those were still common, but now these depths were turned into warrens and hovels. The Sky-Seller lurked and lived in the lowest and smallest and meanest of them all.

He came out only at night. Daylight would have killed him; he knew that. He sold out of the darkest shadows of the night. He had only a few (though oddly select) chents, and nobody knew who his supplier was. He said that he had no suppher, that he gathered and made the stuff himself.

Welkin Alauda, a full-bodied but light-moving girl (it was said that her bones were hollow and filled with air), came to the Sky-Seller just before first light, just when he had become highly nervous but had not yet bolted to his underground.

“A sack of Sky from the nervous mouse. jump, or the sun will gobble your house!” Welkin sang-song, and she was already higher than most skies.

“Hurry, hurry!” the Sky-Seller begged, thrusting the sack to her while his black eyes trembled and glittered (if real light should ever reflect into them he’d go blind).

Welkin took the sack of Sky, and scrambled money notes into his hands which had furred palms. (Really? Yes, really.)

“World be flat and the Air be round, wherever the Sky grows underground,” Welkin intoned, taking the sack of Sky and soaring along with a light scamper of feet (she hadn’t much weight, her bones were hollow). And the Sky-Seller darted head-first down a black well-shaft thing to his depths.

Four of them went Sky-Diving that morning, Welkin herself, Karl Vlieger, Icarus Riley, Joseph Alzarsi; and the pilot was — (no, not who you think, he had already threatened to turn them all in; they’d use that

pilot no more) — the pilot was Ronald Kolibri in his little crop-dusting plane.

But a crop-duster will not go up to the frosty heights they liked to take off from. Yes it will — if everybody is on Sky. But it isn't pressurized, and it doesn't carry oxygen. That doesn't matter, not if everybody is on Sky, not if the plane is on Sky too.

Welkin took Sky with Mountain Whizz, a carbonated drink. Karl stuffed it into his lip like snuff. Icarus Riley rolled it and smoked it. Joseph Alzarsi needled it, mixed with drinking alcohol, into his main vein. The pilot, Ronny, tongued and chewed it like sugar dust. The plane named Shrike took it through the manifold.

Fifty thousand feet — you can't go that high in a crop-duster. Thirty below zero — Ah, that isn't cold! Air too thin to breathe at all — with Sky, who needs such included things as air?

Welkin stepped out, and went up, not down. It was a trick she often pulled. She hadn't much weight; she could always get higher than the rest of them. She went up and up until she disappeared. Then she drifted down again, completely enclosed in a sphere of ice crystal, sparkling inside it and making monkey faces at them.

The wind yelled and barked, and the divers took off. They all went down, soaring and gliding and tumbling; standing still sometimes, it seemed; even rising again a little. They went down to clouds and spread out on them; dark-white clouds with the sun inside them and suffusing them both from above and below. They cracked Welkin's ice-crystal sphere and she stepped out of it. They ate the thin pieces of it, very cold and brittle and with a tang of ozone. Alzarsi took off his shirt and sunned himself on a cloud.

"You will burn," Welkin told him. "Nobody burns so as when sunning himself on a cloud." That was true.

They sank through the black-whiteness of these clouds and came into the limitless blue concourse with clouds above and below them. It was in this same concourse that Hippodameia used to race her horses, there not being room for such coursers to run on earth. The clouds below folded up and the clouds above folded down, forming a discrete space.

"We have our own rotundity and sphere here," said Icarus Riley (these are their Sky-Diver names, not their legal names), "and it is apart from all worlds and bodies. The worlds and bodies do not exist for as long a time

as we say that they do not exist. The axis of our present space is its own concord. Therefore, it being in perfect concord, Time stops.”

All their watches had stopped, at least.

“But there is a world below,” said Karl. “It is an abject world, and we can keep it abject forever if we wish. But it has at least a shadowy existence, and later we will let it fill out again in our compassion for lowly things. It is flat, though, and we must insist that it remain flat.”

“This is important,” Joseph said with the deep importance of one on Sky. “So long as our own space is bowed and globed, the world must remain flat or depressed. But the world must not be allowed to bow its back again. We are in danger if it ever does. So long as it is truly Flat and abject it cannot crash ourselves to it.”

“How long could we fall,” Welkin asked, “if we had not stopped time, if we let it flow at its own pace, or at ours? How long could we fall?”

“Hephaestus once tumbled through space all day long,” Icarus Riley said, “and the days were longer then.”

Karl Vlieger had gone wall-eyed from an interior-turned sexual passion that he often experienced in diving. Icarus Riley seemed to be on laughing gas suddenly; this is a sign that Sky is not having perfect effect. Joseph Alzarsi felt a cold wind down his spine and a series of jerky little premonitions.

“We are not perfect,” Joseph said. “Tomorrow or the next day we may be, for we do approach perfection. We win a round. And we win another. Let us not throw away our victory today through carelessness. The earth has bowed his old back a little bit, and we make ready for him! Now, guys, now!”

Four of them (or maybe only three of them) pulled the rings. The chutes unpeeled, flowered, and jerked. They had been together like a sheaf in close conversation. But suddenly, on coming to earth, they were spread out over five hundred yards.

They assembled. They packed their chutes. That would be all the diving for that day.

“Welkin, how did you pack your chute so quickly?” Icarus asked her suspiciously.

“I don’t know.”

“You are always the slowest one of us, and the sloppiest. Someone always has to re-roll your chute for you before it is used again. And you



were the last one to land just now. How were you the first one to be packed? How did you roll it so well? It has the earmarks of my own rolling, just as I rolled it for you before we took off this morning.”

“I don’t know, Icarus. Oh, I think I’ll go up again, straight up.”

“No, you’ve sailed and dived enough for one morning. Welkin, (lid you even open your chute?”

“I don’t know.”

High on Sky, they went up again the next morning. The little plane named Shrike flew up as no plane had ever flown before, up through Storm. The storm-shrouded earth shrank to the size of a pea-dooie.

“We will play a trick on it,” said Welkin. “When you’re on Sky you can play a trick on anything and make it abide by it. I will say that the pea-dooie that was the world is nothing. See, it is gone. Then I will select another pea-dooie, that one there, and I will call it the world. And that is the world that we will come down to in a little while. I’ve switched worlds on the world, and it doesn’t know what happened to it.”

“It’s uneasy, though,” Joseph Alzarsi spoke through flared nostrils. “You shook it. No wonder the world has its moments of self- doubt.”

They were one million feet high. The altimeter didn’t go that high, but Ronald Kolibri, the pilot, wrote out the extended figure in chalk to make it correct. Welkin stepped out. Karl and Icarus and Joseph stepped out. Ronald Kolibri stepped out, but only for a while. Then he remembered that he was the pilot and got back in the plane. They were so high that the air was black and star-filled instead of blue. It was so cold that the empty space was full of cracks and potholes. They dived half a million feet in no time at all. They pulled up laughing.

It was invigorating, it was vivifying. They stamped on the clouds, and the clouds rang like frosty ground. This was the ancestral country of all hoarfrost, of all grained-snow and glare-ice. Here was weather-maker, here was wind-son. They came into caves of ice mixed with moraine; they found antler hatchets and Hemicyon bones; they found coals still glowing. The winds bayed and hunted in packs through the chasms. These were the cold Fortean clouds, and their location is commonly quite high.

They came down below Storm, finding new sun and new air. it as pumpkin-summer, it was deep autumn in the sky.

They dropped again, miles and millennia, to full Sky-summer: the air

so blue that it grew a violet patina on it to save the surface. Their own space formed about them again, as it did every day, and time stopped.

But not motion! Motion never stopped with them. Do you realize that nothingness in a void can still be in motion? And how much more they of the great centrality! There was Dynamic; there was sustaining vortex; there was the high serenity of fevered motion.

But is not motion merely a relationship of space to time? No. That is an idea that is common to people who live on worlds, but it is a subjective idea. Here, beyond the possible influence of any worlds, there was living motion without reference.

“Welkin, you look quite different today,” Joseph Alzarsi spoke in wonder. “What is it?”

“I don’t know. It’s wonderful to be different and I’m wonderful.”

“It is something missing from you,” said Icarus. “I believe it is a defect missing.”

“But I hadn’t any, Icarus.”

They were in central and eternal moment, and it did not end, it could not end, it goes on yet. Whatever else seems to happen, it is merely in parentheses to that moment.

“It is time to consider again,” Icarus mused after a while. There is no time or while in the Moment, but there is in the parentheses. “I hope it is the last time we will ever have to consider. We, of course, are in our own space and beyond time or tangent. But the earth, Such as it is, is approaching with great presumption and speed.”

“But it’s nothing to us!” Karl Vliieger suddenly raged out in a chthonic and phallic passion. “We can shatter it! We can shoot it to pieces like a clay pigeon! It cannot rush onto us like a slashing dog. Get down, world! Heel, you curl Heel, I say!”

“We say to one world ‘rise’ and it rises, and to another one ‘heel’ and it heels,” Icarus Sky-spoke in his dynamic serenity.

“Not yet,” Joseph Alzarsi warned. “Tomorrow we will be total. Today we are not yet. Possibly we could shatter the world like a clay pigeon if we wished, but we would not be lords of it if we had to shatter it.”

“We could always make another world,” said Welkin reasonably.

“Certainly, but this one is our testing. We will go to it when it is crouched down. We cannot allow it to come ravening to us. Hold! Hold there, we order you!”

And the uprushing world halted, cowed.

“We go down,” said Joseph. “We will let it come tip only when it is properly broken.”

(“And they inclined the heavens and came down.”)

Once more, three of them pulled the rings. And the chutes unpeeled, flowered, and jerked. They had been like a sheaf together in their moment; but now, coming to earth, they were suddenly scattered out over five hundred yards.

“Welkin, you didn’t have your chute at all today!” Icarus gaped with some awe when they had assembled again. “That is what was different about you.”

“No, I guess I didn’t have it. There was no reason to have it if I didn’t need it. Really, there was never any reason for me to have used one at all, ever.”

“Ah, we were total today and didn’t know it,” Joseph ventured. “Tomorrow none of us will wear chutes. This is easier than I had believed.”

Welkin went to the Sky-Seller to buy new Sky that night. Not finding him in the nearer shadows of the Rocks, she went down and down, drawn by the fungoid odor and the echoing dampness of the underground. She went through passages that were man-made, through passages that were natural, through passages that were unnatural. Some of these corridors, it is true, had once been built by men, but now they had reverted and became most unnatural deep-earth caverns. Welkin went down into the total blackness where there were certain small things that still mumbled out a faint white color; but it was the wrong color white, and the things were all of a wrong shape.

There was the dead white shape of Mycelium masses, the grotesqueness of Agaricus, the deformity of Deadly Amanita and of Morel. The gray-milky Lactarius glowed like lightless lanterns in the dark; there was the blue-white of the Deceiving Clitocybe and the yellow-white of the Caesar Agaric. There was the insane ghost-white of the deadhest and queerest of them all, the Fly Amanita, and a mole was gathering this.

“Mole, bring Sky for the Thing Serene, for the Minions tall and the Airy Queen,” Welkin jangled. She was still high on Sky, but it had begun to leave her a little and she had the veriest touch of the desolate sickness.

“Sky for the Queen of the buzzing drones, with her hollow heart and her hollow bones,” the Sky-Seller intoned hollowly.

“And fresh, Oh I want it fresh, fresh Sky!” Welkin cried.

“With these creatures there is no such thing as fresh,” the Sky-Seller told her. “You want it stale, Oh so stale! Ingrown and aged and with its own mold grown moldy.”

“Which is it?” Welkin demanded. “What is the name of the one you gather it from?”

“The Fly Amanita.”

“But isn’t that simply a poisonous mushroom?”

“It has passed beyond that. It has sublimated. Its simple poison has had its second fermenting into narcotic.”

“But it sounds so cheap that it be merely narcotic.”

“Not merely narcotic. It is something very special in narcotic.”

“No, no, not narcotic at all!” Welkin protested. “It is liberating, it is world-shattering. It is Height Absolute. It is motion and detachment itself. It is the ultimate. It is mastery.”

“Why, then it is mastery, lady. It is the highest and lowest of all created things.”

“No, no,” Welkin protested again, “not created. It is not born, it is not made. I couldn’t stand that. It is the highest of all uncreated things.”

“Take it, take it,” the Sky-Seller growled, “and be gone. Something begins to curl up inside me.”

“I go!” Welkin said, “and I will be back many times for more.”

“No, you will not be. Nobody ever comes back many times for Sky. You will be back never. Or one time. I think that you will be back one time.”

They went up again the next morning, the last morning. But why should we say that it was the last morning? Because there would no longer be divisions or days for them. It would be one last eternal day for them now, and nothing could break it.

They went up in the plane that had once been named Shrike and was now named Eternal Eagle. The plane had repainted itself during the night with new name and new symbols, some of them not immediately understandable. The plane snuffled Sky into its manifold, and grinned and roared. And the plane went up!

Oh! Jerusalem in the Sky! How it went up!

They were all certainly perfect now and would never need Sky again. They were Sky.

“How little the world is!” Welkin rang out. “The towns are like fly-specks and the cities are like flies.”

“It is wrong that so ignoble a creature as the Fly should have the exalted name,” Icarus complained.

“I’ll fix that,” Welkin sang. “I give edict: That all the flies on earth be dead!” And all the flies on earth died in that instant.

“I wasn’t sure you could do that,” said Joseph Alzarsi. “The wrong is righted. Now we ourselves assume the noble name of Flies. There are no Flies but us!”

The five of them, including the pilot, Ronald Kolibri, stepped chuteless out of the Eternal Eagle.

“Will you be all right?” Ronald asked the rollicking plane.

“Certainly,” the plane said. “I believe I know where there are other Eternal Eagles. I will mate.”

It was cloudless, or else they had developed the facility of seeing through clouds. Or perhaps it was that, the earth having become as small as a marble, the clouds around it were insignificant. Pure light that had an everywhere source! (The sun also had become insignificant and didn’t contribute much to the light.) Pure and intense motion that had no location reference. They weren’t going anywhere with their intense motion (they already were everywhere, or at the super-charged center of everything).

Pure cold fever. Pure serenity. Impure hyper-space passion of Karl Vlieger, and then of all of them; but it was purely rampant at least. Stunning beauty in all things along with a towering cragginess that was just ugly enough to create an ecstasy.

Welkin Alauda was mythic with nenuphars in her hair. And it shall not be told what Joseph Alzarsi wore in his own hair. An always-instant, a million or a billion years!

Not monotony, no! Presentation! Living sets! Scenery! The scenes were formed for the splinter of a moment; or they were formed forever. Whole worlds formed in a pregnant void: not spherical worlds merely, but dodeka-spherical, and those much more intricate than that. Not merely seven colors to play with, but seven to the seventh and to the seventh again.

Stars vivid in the bright light. You who have seen stars only in darkness be silent! Asteroids that they ate like peanuts, for now they were all metamorphic giants. Galaxies like herds of rampaging elephants. Bridges so long that both ends of them receded over the light-speed edges. Waterfalls, of a finer water, that bounced off galaxy clusters as if they were boulders.

Through a certain ineptitude of handling, Welkin extinguished the old sun with one such leaping torrent.

“It does not matter,” Icarus told her. “Either a million or a billion years had passed according to the time-scale of the bodies, and surely the sun had already come onto dim days. You can always make other suns.”

Karl Vlieger was casting lightning bolts millions of parsecs long and making looping contact with clustered galaxies with them.

“Are you sure that we are not using up any time?” Welkin asked them with some apprehension.

“Oh, time still uses itself tip, but we are safely out of the reach of it all,” Joseph explained. “Time is only one very inefficient method of counting numbers. It is inefficient because it is limited in its numbers, and because the counter by such a system must die when he has come to the end of his series. That alone should weigh against it as a mathematical system; it really shouldn’t be taught.”

“Then nothing can hurt us ever?” Welkin wanted to be reassured.

“No, nothing can come at us except inside time and we are outside it. Nothing can collide with us except in space and we disdain space. Stop it, Karl! As you do it that’s buggery.”

“I have a worm in my own tract and it gnaws at me a little,” the pilot Ronald Kolibri said. “It’s in my internal space and it’s crunching along at a pretty good rate.”

“No, no, that’s impossible. Nothing can reach or hurt us,” Joseph insisted.

“I have a worm of my own in a still more interior tract,” said Icarus, “the tract that they never quite located in the head or the heart or the bowels. Maybe this tract always was outside space. Oh, my worm doesn’t gnaw, but it stirs. Maybe I’m tired of being out of reach of everything.”

“Where do these doubts rise from?” Joseph sounded querulous. “You hadn’t them an instant ago, you hadn’t them as recently as ten million years ago. How can you have them now when there isn’t any now?”

“Well, as to that —” Icarus began — (and a million years went by) — “as to that I have a sort of cosmic curiosity about an object in my own past” — (another million years went by) — “an object called world.”

“Well, satisfy your curiosity then,” Karl Vlieger snapped. “Don’t you even know how to make a world?”

“Certainly I know how, but will it be the same?”

“Yes, if you’re good enough. It will be the same if you make it the same.”

Icarus Riley made a world. He wasn’t very good at it and it wasn’t quite the same, but it did resemble the old world a little.

“I want to see if some things are still there,” Welkin clamored. “Bring it closer.”

“It’s unlikely your things are still there,” Joseph said, “Remember that billions of years may have passed.”

“The things will be there if I put them there,” Icarus insisted.

“And you cannot bring it closer since all distance is now infinite,” Karl maintained.

“At least I can focus it better,” Icarus insisted, and he did. The world appeared quite near.

“It remembers us like a puppy would,” Welkin said. “See, it jumps up at us.”

“It’s more like a lion leaping for a treed hunter just out of reach,” Icarus grtided. “But we are not treed.”

“It can’t ever reach us, and it wants to,” Welkin piqued. “Let’s reach down to it.”

(“And they inclined the heavens and went down.”)

A most peculiar thing happened to Ronald Kolibri as he touched earth. He seemed to have a seizure. He went slack-faced, almost horror-faced, and he would not answer the others.

“What is it, Ronald?” Welkin begged in kindred anguish. “Oh, what is it? Somebody help him!”

Then Ronald Kolibri did an even more peculiar thing. He began to fold up and break up from the bottom. Bones slowly splintered and pierced out of him and his entrails gushed out. He compressed. He shattered. He splashed. Can a man splash?

The same sort of seizure overtook Karl Vlieger: the identical slack-face horror-face, the same folding up and breaking up from the bottom, the

same hideous sequence.

And Joseph Alzarsi went into the same sundering state, baffled and breaking up.

“Icarus, what’s happened to them?” Welkin screamed. “What is the slow loud booming?”

“They’re dead. How could that be?” Icarus puzzled trembling. “Death is in time, and we are not.”

Icarus himself passed through time as he crashed earth, breaking up, spilling out more odiously than any of them.

And Welkin touched earth, crashed, then what? She heard her own slow loud booming as she hit.

(Another million years went by, or some weeks.)

A shaky old woman on crutches was going down the middle-of-the-night passages that are under the Rocks. She was too old a woman to be Welkin Alauda, but not too old for a Welkin who had lived millions of years outside of time.

She had not died. She was lighter than the others, and besides she had done it twice before unscathed. But that was before she had known fear.

Naturally they had told her that she would never walk again; and now most unnaturally she was walking with crutches. Drawn by the fungoid odor and the echoing dampness she went down in the total dark to where small things were growing with the wrong color white and were all of the wrong shape. She wanted one thing only, and she would die without it.

“Sky for salving the broken Crone! Sky for the weal of my hollow bone!” she crackled in an old-woman voice. But it was only her own voice that echoed back to her.

Should a Sky-Seller live forever?



## ONCE ON ARANEA

One fine spider silk, no more than 1/80,000 of an inch thick, could this bind and kill a man? He would soon know. It would be a curious death, to be done in by fine spider silk.

“— but then mine has been a curious life,” Scarble muttered from a tight throat, “and it might as well have an ironic end to it. I wonder if you know, you motherloving spiders,” he called out with difficulty, “that every death is ironic. The arachnidian irony has a pretty fine edge, though.”

It had begun on Aranea a week earlier. In their surveying of the planet-sized asteroids of the Cercyon Belt, their practice was (after the team had completed the Initial Base Survey) to leave a lone man on the asteroid for a short period.

The theory was that any malevolent force, which might not move against a group, could come into the open against a lone man. In practice it had given various results.

Donners said that nothing at all happened on his world when he was there alone, and that nothing had happened to him. But Donners had developed a grotesque facial tic and an oddity of speech and manner. Something had happened to him which he had not realized.

Procop had simply disappeared from his world, completely and with no residue. He couldn't have traveled a hundred kilometers on foot in the time he had, and there was no reason for him to travel even ten. He should have left traces — of the calcium which was hardly on that world at all, of cellular decomposition, of amino acids. If a gram of him had been left on that world in any form, the scanners would have found it, and they hadn't. But exploratory parties grow used to such puzzles.

Bernbeim said that he had gone to pieces when left alone. He did not know whether there had been strange happenings on his world or in his head. He had straightened up only with a great effort when he saw them come back for him, he said. Bernheim had always been a man of compulsive honesty.

Mann said that it hadn't been a picnic when he was left alone, but that nothing had happened there that he wouldn't be able to find an answer to if he could devote a thousand years to it. He said it was more a test of a man than of a world. But it was the test that the Party was to use for the livableness of a world.

On Aranea it was Scarbie who would remain alone and make the test.

On Aranea, the Spider Asteroid, there were two sorts of creatures — at first believed to be three. But two of these first apparent forms were different stages of the same species.

There were the small four-legged scutters. There were the two-legged, two-armed, upright straddling fingerlings. Finally there were the “Spiders” — actually dodecapods, the largest of them as big as a teacup. The two-legged fingerlings were the spiders, after their metamorphosis.

Bernbeim was reading his report, the final bit for the Initial Base Survey:

“The basic emotion of the small quadrupeds, Scutterae Bernheimienseis, is subservience. They register that they are owned by the spider complex, and that they must serve it.”

“So, there are two species, one slave to the other,” said Mario. “It’s a common pattern.”

“The biped fingerlings, Larva Arachnida Marin, do not realize their relationship to the ‘Spiders,’” Bernbeim continued. “When forced into the metamorphosis, their reaction is stark consternation.”

“So would mine be,” said Scarble. “And what’s the basic emotion of the adult spiders, the Arachne Dodecapode Scarble?”

“It is mother-love, lately reoriented by an intrusion and intensified many-fold.”

“By what intrusion? And how intensified?” Mann asked.

“We are the intrusion. We are the intensification,” Bernheim explained. “They are intensely excited only since our arrival. That murmuring and chirping of millions of them is all for us. This is maternal affection gone hysterical — for us!”

They exploded in the first real laughter ever heard on Aranea, and even the spiders giggled in million-voiced accord.

“Oh, those mother-loving spiders!” became their byword for their stay there, and it had to go into the report.

So it was with rare good humor that three of them (Bernheim, Mann, Donners) took off and left Scarble alone on the Spider World, himself chortling every time he thought of the maternal spiders. For companion, Scarble had only a dog named Dog, which is to say Cyon; it was a classical dog.

This would be easy. Scarble liked spiders and even looked like one — a spindly, wiry man covered with black hair almost everywhere except on

the top of his head; a man who ran much to long legs and arms and had not a great amount of body to him. When he waved his arms, as he did when he talked, he gave the impression of having more than two of them. Even his humor was spiderlike.

And what was there to scare any man in the golden daylight of Aranea? Scarble had the name of not being afraid of anything; he had been diligent to give himself that name. And courage is the normal complement of the male animal everywhere. Individual exceptions are common in every species, but they are abnormal. Scarble was normal.

And, should normal courage fail, they had left him a supply of Dutch Courage, and French, Scotch, Canadian, and Kentucky; as well as a distilled-on-the-wing drink known as Rocket Red. They always left a man with a good bottled stock.

It was on this prime stock that the shadow of the coming thing first fell — and Scarble didn't recognize it. He was delighted when he woke from his first sleep on Aranea and saw the stuff as covered with cobwebs as though it had been a hundred years in a cellar. He sampled it with exceptional pleasure. Mellow! Even the Rocket Red had acquired age and potent dignity.

Then he walked all over Aranea with the dog Cyon. That whole world was covered with golden cobwebs; and it brought out the song in Scarble. Man afoot! Here was a whole echoing world to sing in! The full voice is also the normal complement of the male animal, and Scarble had a voice (a bad one) that would fill a world.

“The Spaceman frolicked with his girl

Though all his friends could not abide her. She was a pippin and a pearl, She was a comely twelve-legged spider.”

Scarble added dozens of verses, most of them obscene, while the spider audience in its millions chirped and murmured appreciation. He sang them to the tune of ‘Ganymede Saturday Night.’ He sang all his ballads to that tune. It was the only tune he knew.

Mann had been wrong; it was a picnic after all. Scarble sat on the edge of one of the silken ringed spider ponds and communed with the mother-loving spiders. The cycle of them, he knew, was this:

The little biped fingerlings were born in a sort of caul. Most often the caul is only wrapped about them, and the young ones fight their way out of it and become aware. Sometimes they look as if they arrived wearing

space helmets. Often the young are truly live-born, with only scraps on them of the egg they should have arrived in. The spiders had been surprised in their era of transition.

The newborn bipeds refuse the care of the adult spiders, and run wild at this stage of their being. They destroy everything of the spider nettings and handicrafts that they are able to, and the adult spiders regard them patiently with that abiding mother-love.

And sometime later, when it is time for the change, the adults drug these young, bind them, weave a silk shell around them, and then put a cap on it. Into the cap (it is the hood of the cocoon) is placed one of the small four-legged scutters, freshly killed and made putrescent in some manner. This is the whole purpose in life of the scutters, to feed the pupa form of the spiders.

The pupa spider is somnolent for a long time. Then it begins to eat of the putrescence in the hood, and to change. Four little notches grow out of each of its sides. With these it saws away the cocoon and emerges as a new being. Soon the notches will grow to full members, and the creature then takes its place as a full adult of the Nation of Spiders.

The Spiders were master engineers, and the pattern of the spider ponds built by them covered the whole world of Aranea. They controlled the waters of that world with their silken dams, weirs, levees, and hurdles. The spiders were littoral creatures and had to maintain a controllable water level.

The lakes and ponds were divided by silken barriers into small plots, some of them so completely covered by blue-green vegetation as to have the appearance of lush meadows, others adjacent to them being clear of all growth. The spiders seeded and they harvested. At some of their major dams there were anchoring cables as much as an inch in diameter. Scarble estimated that there might be as many as seven billion individual spider silks making up such a cable.

Scarble sat on the silken edge of one of the pools while the spiders in their myriads twittered about him. Then an expert crew of them performed certain rites at that pool, sweeping it, making it clearer, inviting him to drink.

“Thank you,” said Scarble. He leaned into it and drank deeply. Then he stretched out to rest on the silken shore. He went to sleep.

He dreamed that it was snowing, but in a new and pleasant manner. It

was not like Earth snow, and not at all like the biting snow of Priestly Planet or the blue horror that is the lethal snow on Arestor: This was warm snow, light and full of sun, snowflakes with beards on them like mote-sized comets. Scarble was being covered over by a warm snow that was half sunshine.

He awoke lazily and discovered that it was true. The spiders had been covering him with gossamer and silk, as children on a beach will cover one another with sand. They shot the silks out over him like millions of stream-ers of serpentine. It was a party, a ball given for him; and the spider song had now reached a point of excitement and jubilation.

Scarble tried to raise his head and found that he could not. He gave it up and lay back, deliciously lazy. This was something new in ease. Whether he was sleeping or waking it was all the same. A picnic after all, to be so pleasantly drugged — To be what? An ugly thought came into Scarble's mind and he chased it away. It came again and sat like a little black animal on the edge of his golden dream.

Why hadn't he been able to raise his head?

He cleared his mind of the beginnings of panic.

"Here, here!" he called out. "You're covering me too deep with that damned sand. Fun's fun, but that's enough."

But it was more cohesive than sand. This might be only a noonday dream that would slide away. Well, it wasn't. It was stark afternoon reality. The spiders had him pegged down to the ground with their billion-stranded silk bonds and he could hardly move a muscle.

And the mother-loving little abominations had drugged him by whatever they had put into the inviting drinking pool. The taste in his mouth reminded him of the knock-out drops they used to pass out free as water on New Shanghai.

The spider song became more complex. There were elements of great change in it, the motifs of one world falling away and another one being born. The golden daylight of Aranea was coming to an end. Scarble had enjoyed his luxurious drugged Sleep for more hours than he had believed. Completely weary of his struggle with his bonds, he dropped to sleep again; and the spiders continued to work through the night.

The first thing that Scarble saw in the morning-out of the corner of one eye fixed in his unmoving head-was the spiders maneuvering a large golden ball towards him. They tipped it with lines from the tops of gin

poles. They rolled it over and over, reset their rigging, and rolled it again.

It was the dog Cyon, dead, and cocooned in a sack of silk. The stench of it was unbearable. The dog was not only dead but decayed, almost liquid in its putrefaction, and with the high hair still on it.

Scarble was sickened by this, but he understood the nature of the happening. He was a naturalist, and he knew that anger was an unnaturalist response, and that murder and putrefaction are natural workings. But Cyon wasn't merely a dog. He was also a personal friend of Scarble.

Scarble could not turn to see what was behind his own head, but he knew that spiders had been working on something there all night. He realized now what it was: a snood, a capuchin like a friar's, the hood to be his own cocoon. He knew with horror what thing they were rolling into that hood now, and how the hood would be joined onto his own cocoon. It happened quickly.

Scarbie's screams were drowned in the near liquid mass; they had a drumlike sound even to his own ears as though they were coming from under water. They merged easily with the spider music which had just the place for that screaming motif.

Then overpowering sickness sent Scarble into merciful unconsciousness after the dead and rotting dog was rolled into his face and closed in with him as their cocoons became one.

How long does it take a man to die in such circumstances? Scarble set his mind to do it as quickly as possible, but he was too tough for his own good. By second night he still could not arrive at death, but he welcomed the dark. The dog's carcass had become higher and more pungent, and the agony of Scarble took on new refinements. He was thirsty to the point of madness, and so hungry that he could eat anything — almost anything.

It frightened him that he could now understand the spider mind so clearly. The spiders worked by analogy. They believed Scarbie to be an unfinished two-legged strider, come to them with his quadruped that was born for one purpose — to feed him when he went into pupa form before being metamorphosed into a giant Emperor Spider. Aye, they believed Scarble to be the Emperor Spider promised to them from the beginning of time.

The spider song was a dirge now, the passing of the old life, the death and decay fugue. But in the complex of the dirge there were introductory

passages of something much higher: the Anastasis, the Resurrection Song.

“You mother-loving spiders!” Scarble called out in fury. “You think I’m going to eat Cyon and then turn into a spider. You’re wrong, I tell you! The biology of the thing is impossible, but how do you explain biology to spiders?”

To be dying of thirst and there no liquid to mouth except that! To be starving and there no food available but this soft putridity pressed into his face!

There was a change in the tempo of the spider song. It rose in the crescendo of transition and made Scarble angry.

“You presumptive little twelve-legged crawlers, you’re getting ahead of me! Don’t tell me what to do. Don’t act as though I had already done it.”

But the hours had taken their price, and Scarble had already passed through madness and into the world on the other side. He didn’t know when it began, but the spiders knew of the change about third dawn. The spiders’ soaring incantation rose to new heights, and Scarble was able to follow it. He was hearing tones above the range of the human ear.

Scarble began to eat of the putrefied mass — and to change. The Hallelujah Chorus of the Spider Song rose in a vast symphony.

In the Spaceman’s Survival Handbook there is one instruction which some have believed to be written in humor: ‘Never die till you have considered every alternative to a situation.’

Well, how does a man get out of a situation like this?

He doesn’t.

Well then, how does a spider get out of a situation like this?

He grows eight more short little notches of legs, and he shuffles and saws his way out of the cocoon with them.

“It’s worth a try,” Scarble said. “I’ll see if I’ve turned into a spider.”

He had. He did it. It worked.

They disabled Scarble from the active service. He could give no intelligent account of his lone stay on Aranea. He gave out with nothing but sick quips like:

“Cyon was a good dog, but only after he had become very bad,” and “The Spiders tied me up and made me eat the dog, and then they turned me into a spider.”

Scarble was plainly insane, but pleasantly so. And there was nothing left of the dog except curiously softened bones.

They sent Scarbie back to Earth and kept him under observation. Such men were handled with sympathy. They called him the Spider Man around the wards. But after a while that sympathy ran a little thin. Earth was having her own troubles with spiders.

“I’ve never seen anything like them,” an earthside doctor told Scarble in examining him one day, as he brushed some of that floating stuff out of his eyes. “The growths are not malignant, but they will be mighty unhandy. Since they are not malignant, I cannot remove them without your permission, Scarble. They’re getting larger, you know.”

“Certainly they’re getting larger,” Scarbie maintained. “I’m quite pleased with the way they’re coming along. They get to be as big as the spiders’ other legs. And don’t remove them! I’d as soon lose one of my other limbs as one of them. They saved my life. I couldn’t have gotten out of my cocoon without them.”

“You’re going to have to get off this spider jag, Scarble. Have you been reading the crank reports about the spiders and have they upset you?”

“Why should they upset me, Doctor? Everything is going as smooth as - ah — spidersilk. Naturally I have my own intelligence setup on these matters. And the fact that you refer to them as ‘crank reports’ likewise pleases me. I’m on the top of the heap, Doctor. Who else has a hundred billion soldiers ready to strike? We live in exciting times, do we not?”

“As to that sickness of yours, Scarble, I’ll gladly leave it to your other doctor, your psycho doctor; and now it is time for you to go and see him. But I wish you’d let me remove those growths before they become larger. They’re almost like other limbs.”

“Quite like,” said Scarble. He left the room majestically in the flowing robes which he now affected and went down the corridor to see his other doctor. The robes served a purpose. They did cover Scarble’s afflictions, the four strange growths on each side of his body. And also:

“An Emperor always wears flowing robes,” Scarble said. “You can’t expect him to go dressed like a commoner.”

Doctor Mosca, Scarble’s other doctor, was a quiet and patient man. He was also a dull fellow who had to have simple things explained to him over and over again.

“What are you today, Scarble?” Doctor Mosca asked again as he



brushed some of the floating stuff away.

“Why, I’m the Emperor of the Dodecapod Spiders of Aranea,” Scarble said pleasantly. “I explain that to you every day, doctor, but you don’t seem to remember. I am also Prefect Extraordinary to the Aranea Spiders of the Dispersal. And I am Proconsul to the Spiders of Earth.”

“Scarbie, I’ll be plain with you. Your planet probe experience (whatever it was) has unhitched your mind. And you have somehow connected whatever happened on Aranea to the recent spider incidents on Earth. I will admit that some of these incidents are peculiar and almost insane —” “No, no, Doctor, not insane. They are absolutely reasonable — according to the Higher Reason. They are organized and directed and strictly on schedule. To call the incidents insane would be almost like calling me insane.

“Mr. Scarble, we don’t keep you here for your poolshooting ability, though you’re good at that. We keep you here because you’re very sick — mentally. Now listen to me carefully: You are a man, and not a spider.”

“I’m glad you think so, doctor. Our high council decided that it would be better if I retained the basic man-appearance until our present military operation is completed. It should be completed today.”

“Scarbie, you’ve got to get hold of yourself!” Doctor Mosca insisted. He brushed heaps of the accumulated silkstuff off his desk. “You are a man, and an intelligent man. We have to get you off this insane spider jag of yours. And it’s not my department, but somebody had better get the world off its jag, too. Every year has its own peculiar sort of nuttiness, but the Spider Incidents have become downright silly. Do you know that, with the recent astronomical increases of the spiders —”

“That may be an unconscious pun,” Scarble interrupted.

“— that it is estimated there are now a hundred billion spiders in this country alone.”

“Multiply that figure by a thousand if you wish,” Scarble said. “Last night was the Night of the Great Hatching, and the young ones grow to effective size in hours, all stages of them quickly now. The time is at hand. I give the word now!”

“Great thumping thunder!” Doctor Mosca howled. “I’m bitten badly! Another spider bite.”

“Not just another bite,” Scarble said. “That was the critical bite. I’m sincerely sorry for the pain: but, with so many people to impregnate, I

could not equip all my creatures with painless probes. It eases off now, though, doesn't it? The injection contains a narcotic and a soporific."

It did. Doctor Mosca drowsed. He half-dreamed that it was snowing, but in a new and pleasant manner. It was warm snow, light and full of sun, flakes with beards on them like mote-sized comets.

The suddenly appearing spiders were covering Doctor Mosca with gossamer and silk, as children will cover each other with sand on a beach. And they were covering many millions of others, all stung and sunk into pleasant lethargy and drowsiness, with billions of streamers of serpentine silk.

It was deliciously lazy for Doctor Mosca to lie back in the chair and hear that demented Scarble drone on that he was no longer a man — (Doctor Mosca found that he could no longer move his head: there was something odd about that) — that Scarble was no longer a man, whatever his appearance, that he was really the Emperor of the Dodecapod Spiders of Aranea, and of all Spiders everywhere.

## EUREMA'S DAM

He was about the last of them.

What? The last of the great individualists? The last of the true creative geniuses of the century? The last of the sheer precursors?

No. No. He was the last of the dolts.

Kids were being born smarter all the time when he came along, and they would be so forever more. He was about the last dumb kid ever born.

Even his mother had to admit that Albert was a slow child. What else can you call a boy who doesn't begin to talk till he is four years old, who won't learn to handle a spoon till he is six, who can't operate a doorknob till he is eight? What else can you say about one who put his shoes on the wrong feet and walked in pain? And who had to be told to close his mouth after yawning.

Some things would always be beyond him — like whether it was the big hand or the little hand of the clock that told the hours. But this wasn't something serious. He never did care what time it was.

When, about the middle of his ninth year, Albert made a breakthrough at telling his right hand from his left he did it by the most ridiculous set of mnemonics ever put together. It had to do with the way dogs turn around before lying down, the direction of whirlpools and whirlwinds, the side a cow is milked from and a horse is mounted from, the direction of twist of oak and sycamore leaves, the maze patterns of rock moss and tree moss, the cleavage of limestone, the direction of a hawk's wheeling, a shrike's hunting, and a snake's coiling (remembering that the Mountain Boomer is an exception), the lay of cedar fronds and balsam fronds, the twist of a hole dug by a skunk and by a badger (remembering pungently that skunks sometimes use old badger holes). Well, Albert finally learned to remember which was right and which was left, but an observant boy would have learned his right hand from his left without all that nonsense.

Albert never learned to write a readable hand. To get by in school he cheated. From a bicycle speedometer, a midget motor, tiny eccentric cams, and batteries stolen from his grandfather's hearing aid Albert made a machine to write for him. It was small as a doodlebug and fitted onto pen or pencil so that Albert could conceal it with his fingers. It formed the letters beautifully as Albert set the cams to follow a copybook model. He

triggered the different letters with keys no bigger than whiskers. Sure it was crooked, but what else can you do when you're too dumb to learn how to write passably?

Albert couldn't figure at all. He had to make another machine to figure for him. It was a palm-of-the-hand thing that would add and subtract and multiply and divider he next year when he was in the ninth grade they gave him algebra, and he had to devise a flipper to go on the end of his gadget to work quadratic and simultaneous equations. If it weren't for such cheating Albert wouldn't have gotten any marks at all in school.

He had another difficulty when he came to his fifteenth year. People, that is an understatement. There should be a stronger word than "difficulty" for it. He was afraid of girls.

What to do?

"I will build me a machine that is not afraid of girls," Albert said. He set to work on it. He had it nearly finished when a thought came to him: "But no machine is afraid of girls. How will this help me?"

His logic was at fault and analogy broke clown. He did what he always did. He cheated.

He took the programming rollers from an old player piano in the attic, found a gear case that would serve, used magnetized sheets instead of perforated music rolls, read a copy of Wormwood's Logic into the matrix, and he had a logic machine that would answer questions.

"What's the matter with me that I'm afraid of girls?" Albert asked his logic machine.

"Nothing the matter with you," the logic machine told him. "It's logical to be afraid of girls. They seem pretty spooky to me too."

"But what can I do about it?"

"Wait for time and circumstances. They sure are slow. Unless you want to cheat —"

"Yes, yes, what then?"

"Build a machine that looks just like you, Albert, and talks just like you. Only make it smarter than you are, and not bashful. And, ah, Albert, there's a special thing you'd better put into it in case things go wrong. I'll whisper it to you. it's dangerous."

So Albert made Little Danny, a dummy who looked like him and talked like him, only he was smarter and not bashful. He filled Little Danny with quips from Mad magazine and from Quip, and then they

were set.

Albert and Little Danny went to call on Alice.

“Why, he’s wonderful!” Alice said. “Why can’t you be like that, Albert? Aren’t you wonderful, Little Danny? Why do you have to be so stupid, Albert, when Little Danny is so wonderful?”

“I, uh, uh, I don’t know,” Albert said, “uh, uh, uh.”

“He sounds like a fish with the hiccups,” Little Danny said.

“You do, Albert, really you do!” Alice screamed. “Why can’t you say smart things like Little Danny does, Albert? Why are you so stupid?”

This wasn’t working out very well, but Albert kept with it. He programmed Little Danny to play the ukelele and to sing. He wished that he could program himself to do it. Alice loved everything about Little Danny, but she paid no attention to Albert. And one day Albert had had enough.

“Wha — wha — what do we need with this dummy?” Albert asked. “I just made him to am — to amu — to make you laugh. Let’s go off and leave him.”

“Go off with you, Albert?” Alice asked. “But you’re so stupid. I tell you what. Let’s you and me go off and leave Albert, Little Danny. We can have more fun without him.”

“Who needs him?” Little Danny asked. “Get lost, Buster.”

Albert walked away from them. He was glad that he’d taken his logic machine’s advice as to the special thing to be built into Little Danny. He walked fifty steps. A hundred. “Far enough,” Albert said, and he pushed a button in his pocket.

Nobody but Albert and his logic machine ever did know what that explosion was. Tiny wheels out of Little Danny and small pieces of Alice rained down a little later, but there weren’t enough fragments for anyone to identify.

Albert had learned one lesson from his logic machine: never make anything that you can’t unmake.

Well, Albert finally grew to be a man, in years at least. He would always have something about him of a very awkward teenager. And yet he fought his own war against those who were teenagers in years, and defeated them completely. There was enmity between them forever. He hadn’t been a very well-adjusted adolescent, and he hated the memory of it. And nobody ever mistook him for an adjusted man.

Albert was too awkward to earn a living at an honest trade. He was

reduced to peddling his little tricks and contrivances to shysters and promoters. But he did back into a sort of fame, and he did become burdened with wealth.

He was too stupid to handle his own monetary affairs, but he built an actuary machine to do his investing and became rich by accident; he built the damned thing too good and he regretted it.

Albert became one of that furtive group that has saddled us with all the mean things in our history. There was that Punic who couldn't learn the rich variety of hieroglyphic characters and who (revised the crippled short alphabet for wan-wits. There was the nameless Arab who couldn't count beyond ten and who set up the ten-number system for babies and idiots. There was the double-Dutchman with his movable type who drove fine copy out of the world. Albert was of their miserable company.

Albert himself wasn't much good at anything. But he had in himself a low knack for making machines that were good at everything.

His machines did a few things. You remember that anciently there was smog in the cities. Oh, it could have been drawn out of the air easily enough. All it took was a tickler. Albert made a tickler machine. He would set it fresh every morning. It would clear the air in a three hundred yards around his hovel and gather a little over a ton of residue every twenty-four Hours. This residue was rich in large polysyllabic molecules which one of his chemical machines could use.

"Why can't you clear all the air?" the people asked him.

"This is as much of the stuff as Clarence Deoxyribonucleiconibus needs every day," Albert said. That was the name of this particular machine.

"But we die from the smog," the people told him. "Have mercy on us."

"Oh, all right," Albert said. He turned it over to one of his reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary.

You remember that once there was a teen-ager problem? You remember when those little buggers used to be mean? Albert got enough of them. There was something ungainly about them that reminded him too much of himself. He made a teen-ager of his own. It was rough. To the others it looked like one of themselves, the ring

in the left ear, the dangling side-locks, the brass knucks and the long knife, the guitar pluck to jab in the eye. But it was incomparably rongher than the human teenagers. It terrorized all in the neighborhood and

made them behave, and dress like real people. There was one thing about the teen-age machine that Albert made. It was made of such polarized metal and glass that it was invisible except to teenager eyes.

“Why is your neighborhood different?” the people asked him. “Why are there such good and polite teenagers in your neighborhood and such mean ones everywhere else? It’s as though something had spooked all those right around here.”

“Oh, I thought I was the only one who didn’t like the regular kind,” Albert said.

“Oh no, no,” the people said. “If there is anything at all you can do about it—”

So Albert turned his mostly invisible teen-ager machine over to one of his reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary, and set up one in every neighborhood. From that day to this the Teenagers have all been good and polite and a little bit frightened. But there is no evidence of what keeps them that way except an occasional eye dangling from the jab of an invisible guitar pluck.

So the two most pressing problems of the latter part of the twentieth century were solved, but accidentally and to the credit of no one.

As the years went by, Albert felt his inferiority most when in the presence of his own machines, particularly those in the form of men. Albert just hadn’t their urbanity or sparkle or wit. He was a clod beside them, and they made him feel it.

Why not? One of Albert’s devices sat in the President’s Cabinet. One of them was on the High Council of World-Watchers that kept peace everywhere. One of them presided at Riches Unlimited, that private-public-international instrument that guaranteed reason and riches to everyone in the world. One of them was the guiding hand in the Health and Longevity foundation that provided those things to everyone. Why should not such splendid and machines look down on their shabby uncle who had made them?

“I’m rich by a curious twist,” Albert said to himself one day, “and honored through a mistake, of circumstance. But there isn’t a man or machine in the world who is really my friend. A book here tells how to make friends, but I can’t do it that way. I’ll make one my own way.”

So Albert set out to make a friend.

He made Poor Charles, a machine as stupid and awkward and inept as

himself. “Now I will have a companion,” Albert said, but it didn’t work. Add two zeros together and you still have zero. Poor Charles was too much like Albert to be good for anything.

Poor Charles! Unable to think, he made a — (but wait a moleskin-gloved minute here, Colonel, this isn’t going to work out at all) — he made a mach — (but isn’t this the same blamed thing all over again?) — he made a machine to think for him and to —

Hold it, hold it! That’s enough. Poor Charles was the only machine that Albert ever made that was dumb enough to do a thing like that.

Well, whatever it was, the machine that Poor Charles made was in control of the situation and of Poor Charles when Albert came onto them accidentally. The machine’s machine, the device that Poor Charles had constructed to think for him, was lecturing Poor Charles in a humiliating way.

“Only the inept and the deficient will invent,” that damned machine’s machine was droning. “The Greeks in their high period did not invent. They used neither adjunct power nor instrumentation. They used, as intelligent men or machines will always use, slaves. They did not descend to gadgets. They, who did the difficult with ease, did not seek the easier way.

“But the incompetent will invent. The insufficient will invent. The depraved will invent. And knaves will invent.”

Albert, in a seldom fit of anger, killed them both. But he knew the machine of his machine had spoken the truth.

Albert was very much cast down. A more intelingent man would have had a hunch as to what was wrong. Albert had only a hunch that he was not very good at hunches and would never be. Seeing no way out, he fabricated a machine and named it Hunchy.

In most ways this was the worst machine he ever made. In building it he tried to express something of his unease for the future. It was an awkward thing in mind and mechanism, a misfit.

His more intelligent machines gathered around and hooted at him while he put it together.

“Boy! Are you lost!” they taunted. “That thing is a primitive! To draw its power from the ambient! We talked you into throwing that away twenty years ago and setting up coded power for all of us.”

“Uh — someday there may be social disturbances and all centers of



power and apparatuses seized,” Albert stammered. “But Hunchy would be able to operate if the whole world were wiped smooth.”

“It isn’t even tuned to our information matrix,” they jibed. “It’s worse than Poor Charles. That stupid thing practically starts from scratch.”

“Maybe there’ll be a new kind of itch for it,” said Albert.

“It’s not even housebroken!” the urbane machines shouted their indignation. “Look at that! Some sort of primitive lubrication all over the floor.”

“Remembering my childhood, I sympathize,” Albert said.

“What’s if good for?” they demanded.

“Ah — it gets hunches,” Albert mumbled.

“Duplication!” they shouted. “That’s all you’re good for yourself, and not very good at that. We suggest an election to replace you as — pardon our laughter — head of these enterprises.”

“Boss, I got a hunch how we can block them there,” the unfinished Hunchy whispered.

“They’re bluffing,” Albert whispered back. “My first logic machine taught me never to make anything I can’t unmake. I’ve got them there, and they know it. I wish I could think up things like that myself.”

“Maybe there will come an awkward time and I will be good for something,” Hunchy said.

Only once, and that rather late in life, did a sort of honesty flare up in Albert. He did one thing (and it was a dismal failure) on his own. That was the night in the year of the double millennium when Albert was presented with the Finnerty-Hochmann Trophy, the highest award that the intellectual world could give. Albert was certainly an odd choice for it, but it had been noticed that almost every basic invention for thirty years could be traced back to him or to the devices with which he had surrounded himself.

You know the trophy. Atop it was Eurema, the synthetic Greek goddess of invention, with arms spread as though she would take flight. Below this was a stylized brain cut away to show the convoluted cortex. And below this was the coat of arms of the Academicians: Ancient Scholar rampant (argent); the Anderson Analyzer sinister (gules); the Mondeman Space-Drive dexter (vair). It was a very fine work by Groben, his ninth period.

Albert had the speech composed for him by his speech-writing

machine, but for some reason he did not use it. He went on his own, and that was disaster. He got to his feet when he was introduced, and he stuttered and spoke nonsense:

“Ah — only the sick oyster produces nacre,” he said, and they all gaped at him. What sort of beginning for a speech was that? “Or do I have the wrong creature?” Albert asked weakly.

“Eurema does not look like that!” Albert gawked out and pointed suddenly at the trophy. “No, no, that isn’t her at all. Eurema walks backward and is blind. And her another is a brainless hulk.”

Everybody was watching him with pained expression. “Nothing rises without a leaven,” Albert tried to explain, “but the yeast is itself a fungus and a disease. You be regularizers all, splendid and supreme. But you cannot live without the irregulars. You will die, and who will tell you that you are dead? When there are no longer any deprived or insufficient, who will invent? What will you do when there are none of us defectives left? Who will leaven your lump then?”

“Are you unwell?” the master of ceremonies asked him quietly. “Should you not make an end of it? People will understand.”

“Of course I’m unwell. Always have been,” Albert said. “What good would I be otherwise? You set the ideal that all should be healthy and well adjusted. No! No! Were we all well adjusted, we would ossify and die. The world is kept healthy only by some of the unhealthy minds lurking in it. The first implement made by man was not a scraper or celt or stone knife. It was a crutch, and it wasn’t devised by a hale man.”

“Perhaps you should rest,” a functionary said in a low voice, for his sort of rambling nonsense talk had never been heard at an t awards dinner before.

“Know you,” said Albert, “that it is not the fine bulls and wonderful cattle who make the new paths. Only a crippled calf makes a new path. In everything that survives there must be an element of he incongruous. Hey, you know the woman who said, ‘My husband is incongruous, but I never liked Washington in the summertime.’”

Everybody gazed at him in stupor.

“That’s the first joke I ever made,” Albert said lamely. “My joke-making machine makes them lots better than I do.” He paused and gaped, and gulped a big breath. “Dolts!” He croaked out fiercely then. “What will you do for dolts when the last of us is gone? How will you

survive without us?”

Albert had finished. He gaped and forgot to close his mouth. They led him back to his seat. His publicity machine explained that Albert was tired from overwork, and then the thing passed around copies of the speech that Albert was supposed to have given.

It had been an unfortunate episode. How noisome it is that the innovators are never great men. And the great men are never good for anything but just being great men.

In that year a decree went forth from Caesar that a census of the whole country should be taken. The decree was from Caesar Panebianco, the President of the country; it was the decimal year proper for the census, and there was nothing unusual about the decree. Certain provisions, however, were made for taking a census of the drifters and decrepits who were usually missed, to examine them and to see why they were so. It was in the course of this that Albert was picked up. If any man ever looked like a drifter and a decrepit, it was Albert.

Albert was herded in with other derelicts, sat down at a table, and asked tortuous questions. As:

“What is your name?”

He almost muffed that one, but he rallied and answered, “Albert.”

“What time is it by that clock?”

They had him there in his old weak spot. Which hand was which? He gaped and didn’t answer.

“Can you read?”

“Not without my —” Albert began. “I don’t have with me my — No, I can’t read very well by myself.”

“Try.”

They gave him a paper to mark up with true and false questions. Albert marked them all true, believing that he would have half of them right. But they were all false. The regularized people are partial to falsehood. When they gave him a supply-the-word test on proverbs.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is the best policy” didn’t mean a thing to him. He couldn’t remember the names of the companies that he had his own policies with.

“A \_\_\_\_\_ in time saves nine” contained more mathematics than Albert could handle. “There appear to be six unknowns,” he told himself, “and only one positive value, nine. The equating verb ‘saves’ is a vague one. I cannot solve this equation. I am not even sure it is in equation. If

only I bid with me my —”

But he hadn't any of his gadgets or machines with him. He was on his own. He left half a dozen more proverb fill-ins blank. Then he saw the chance to recoup. Nobody is so dumb as not to know one answer if enough questions are asked.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is the mother of invention,” it said.

“Stupidity,” Albert wrote in his weird ragged hand. Then he sat back in triumph. “I know that Eurema and her mother,” he snickered. “Man, how I do know them!”

But they marked him wrong on that one too. He had missed every answer to every test. They began to fix him a ticket to a progressive booby hatch where he might learn to do something with his hands, his head being hopeless.

A couple of Albert's urbane machines came down and got him out of it. They explained that, while he was a drifter and a derelict, yet he was a rich drifter and derelict and that he was even a man of some note.

“He doesn't look it, but he really is — pardon our laughter — a man of some importance,” one of the fine machines explained. “He has to be told to close his mouth after he has yawned, but for all that he is the winner of the Finnerty-Hochmann Award. We will be responsible for him.”

Albert was miserable as his fine machines took him out, especially when they asked that he walk three or four steps behind them and not seem to be with them. They gave him some pretty rough banter and turned him into a squirming worm of a man. Albert left them and went to a little hide-out he kept.

“I'll blow my crawfishing brains out,” he swore. “The humiliation is more than I can bear. Can't do it myself I though. I'll have to have it done.”

He set to work building a device in his hide-out.

“What you doing, boss?” Hunchy asked him. “I had a hunch you'd come here and start building something.”

“Building a machine to blow my pumpkin-picking brains out,” Albert shouted. “I'm too yellow to do it myself.”

“Boss, I got a hunch there's something better to do. Let's have some fun.”

“Don't believe I know how to,” Albert said thoughtfully. “I built a fun machine once to do it for me. He had a real revel till he flew apart, but he

never seemed to do anything for me.”

“This fun will be for you and me. Consider the world spread out. What is it?”

“It’s a world too fine for me to live in any longer,” Albert said. “Everything and all the people are perfect, and all alike. They’re at the top of the heap. They’ve won it all and arranged it all neatly. There’s no place for a clutter-up like me in the world. So I get out.”

“Boss, I’ve got a hunch that you’re seeing it wrong. You’ve got better eyes than that. Look again, real canny, at it. Now what do you see?”

“Hunchy, Hunchy, is that possible? Is that really what it is? I wonder why I never noticed it before. That’s the way of it, though, now that I look closer.

“Six billion patsies waiting to be took! Six billion patsies without a defense of any kind! A couple of guys out for some fun, man, they could mow them down like fields of Albert-Improved Concho Wheat!”

“Boss, I’ve got a hunch this is what I was made for. The world sure has been getting stuffy. Let’s tie into it and eat off the top layer. Man, we can cut a swath!”

“We’ll inaugurate a new era!” Albert gloated. “We’ll call it the Turning of the Worm. We’ll have fun, Hunchy. We’ll gobble them up like goobers. How come I never saw it like that before? Six billion patsies!”

The twenty-first century began on this rather odd note.

## DORG

The Problem: Straighted Ecology (not enough to eat).

Projected Answer: Turnip and Tetrapod.

Projected Method: Find them, find them.

Methodologist: A Crash-Oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology.

Spin-Offs: An Amalgamated Youth, a Trilobal Psychologist, a Mad Cartoonist.

Recycled Method: "On your feet, Dordogne, do it one more time."

"It beats me how you will find the answer to world hunger in a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist," the pleasantly ponderous Annalouise Krug railed angrily. (Annalouise was a member of Amalgamated Youth.) "This is the sort of unimaginative drivel we have always had from the aged," she ran on. (Whenever three or more persons were gathered together anywhere in the world to discuss actions, a member of Amalgamated Youth must be present; this was the law.) "What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus: not the woeful stutterings of aged minds," she stated.

"You are the oldest person present, Annalouise," Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology bounded back at her.

"The oldest only in years, and then only if you unjuggle the record," Annalouise maintained. "I have had my age officially set back eleven years. In Amalgamated Youth we have that privilege. Besides, you have no idea how difficult it is to recruit chronological youths into Amalgamated Youth. Further besides, Adrian, you are a crook-tailed boor to mention my age, considering all the years I have given to Youth. "

"And you are a slashing female shrew, Annalouise, to refer to Dordogne and Riddle as respectively mad and half-mad while they are present," Adrian D. volleyed the words back off Annalouise.

Jame Riddle had fixed Annalouise with a pleasant scowl when she called him half-mad. J. P. Dordogne had sketched on a square of paper, then balled it up thrown it to her. She smoothed it out and looked at it.

"They are no less mad for being present," she said with some reason. "Let's start it again, old men. How are you going to solve the problem of world hunger with a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist? Neither one of them knows anything about ecology. Neither one knows anything about anything. And as to food, why I could eat them both up within a

week myself and be hungry again.”

Annalouise Krug, though she was both the largest and oldest person present, was also the prettiest. And she was not really so old: she was not yet thirty. None of the four persons present was of really advanced years or stiffened mind. This Annalouise was of the swift and powerful loveliness and full figure that is sometimes caned Junoesque, but we will not call her so. She was suddenly in the fashion, though. There is something interesting about full-bodied women in those times when the edge is on the hunger just a bit. Besides which she held her age better than did most members of Amalgamated Youth.

The mad cartoonist was J.P. (Jasper Pendragon) Dordogne. He used to sign his strips “Dorg,” and some of his friends called him Mad Dorg. He was a small, sandy young fellow, all bland and grinning except for his mad black eyes which he said he had inked in himself. While Annalouise was tonguelashing them, Dordogne had sat silently drawing lampoons of her, balling them up, and throwing them to her, and she caught them and smoothed them out with beautiful anger.

“Tje dorg has actually been seen, Annalouise,” Adrian Durchbruch lobbed the words in as he bounced around. “It has been seen by at least a dozen persos.” Adrian was not referring to the cartoonist “Dorg” Dordogne, but to the fabled animal named dorg that sometimes appeared in Dordogne’s comic strip. And now there had been a whole spate of clownish reports that the burlesque animal had actually been seen out in the boondocks, alive and all.

Adrian bounced around constantly as though he had springs in the balls of his deet. He expediated, he organized, he said things like “Let’s have a brain-crash” when he meant “Let’s discuss this for a moment.” He was the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology. He had held the job for only a week, and he wouldn’t last another week if he didn’t come with something good. There was a rapid turnover of chiefs in the Department of Remedial Ecology. That showed constant effort and reassessment, even if there were no results in the department.

“I don’t believe it,” Annalouise claimed and resonated. A skinny girl simply will not leave that full resonance. “If ever I see it I’ll go get my eyes fixed. I will not believe it, not when the witless Dordogne invented it in his comic strip; not when the half-witless Jimmy Riddle declared that it was a creative act and that the animal was bound to appear soon

afterward. There cannot be such an animal.”

“It’s that or turnips,” the psychologist said, “and they’ve already got whole shoals of psychologists studying the creative act in neo-turnips.” James Riddle was the trilobal psychologist. He really had a third lobe or cerebral hemisphere to his brain, this on the actual testimony of proper doctors, but it didn’t seem to do much for him. He was boyish and dreamy and horn-rimmed. His theories were astonishing, but he wasn’t.

“Since this is our study and our problem, we may as well go and see if we can catch a glimpse of the dorg,” Riddle chattered.

“What worries me,” Adrian Durchbruch said, “is that there seems to be only one dorg, a male.”

“But that part is almost too good to be true,” Riddle exulted. “It’s in total concord with my theory. You knew it would be that way, didn’t you, Dordogne?”

“Yes, but I’ve been afraid to finish drawing it that way,” the mad cartoonist mumbled.

“Where has the dorg been sighted, Adian?” Riddle asked him.

“Down in the Winding Stair Mountains of — ah — Oklahoma,” Durchbruch chirped, and bounced around in eagerness to be at it.

“Then let’s fly down there right now,” Riddle offered. “I used to own an airplane. I wonder if I still have it.”

“Yes, you still have it,” Annalouise told him.

“Good, let’s go.” All of them, Dordogne the mad cartoonist, James Riddle the trilobal psychologist, Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology, and Annalouise Krug the Amalgamated Youth went out to Riddle’s place and got in the plane.

“Which way is Oklahoma?” Riddle asked when they were airborne. “Listen to the sound of that engine, people, to the sound of any engine anywhere. Do yen kwow that functionally the engine sounds have no purpose? The various engines produce their monotonous noises solely to hypnotize human persons. Then the engines are able to —” But Riddle’s warning words were suddenly blocked out by the engine’s sudden increased noise volume. Engines will do that every time the stibject is about to be discussed.

The world was in pretty short supply as to food. The miracle of the barley loaves and the fishes had fed the multitudes for a long time. Barley had been developed that would yield five hundred bushels an acre, and



billions and billions of fishes had been noodled out of the oceans. The oceans, however, are mostly desert, so have they always been; and the oases and streams and continental shelves of them had been harvested to their limits of both fish and plankton. And on land all the worthy areas were producing to their utmost, and still it was not enough.

The solution: Turnip or Tetrapod. A plant was needed that would grow more lush than barley, more lush than grass, that would be fully edible for humans in both top and bottom of it, that would grow on even the worst land. And such a plant was being searched for carefully. More than that, it was being invented every day, everywhere, everyhow. But the new plants were not really good enough.

And a four-footed annual (they are the best kind) was being searched out. It would have to be a fine fleshed and multiple-bearing annual, with as many litters as possible a year; one that would grow quickly to great size and succulence; one that could eat and thrive on anything, anything, even — one that could eat —

About that time, the mad cartoonist J.P. Dordogne invented just such an annual in his comic strip. It was a big, comical, rock-eating animal. It struck the popular fancy and humor at once, though it did not at once put anything into the popular stomach. It was a shambling hulk of an animal, good-natured and weird. It ate earth and rocks and anything at all. It didn't even need vegetation, or water. It grew peculiarly fat on such feeding.

And the dorg had a fine slow wit as shown in the comic strip dialogue balloons. The people liked the dorg and especially liked the idea that the animal could grow so large and toothsome on nothing but rocks and earth. The animal was not loved the less because there was something unreal and mad about it, even beyond the unreality of all things in that medium. Something else: the dorg in the comic strip was always feeling bad: there was an air of something momentous about to happen to him.

The dorg filled an inner need, of emotion if not of stomach yet. It became the hopeful totem of the people on the bitig edge of hunger. And the dorg was unmistakable; that was what gave the news reports their sharp interest. There was recognition and recollection of the dorg as matching a buried interior image. It could not be mistaken for something else. The sighters had sighted the dorg, or they had suffered hallucination. But they had not mistaken some other object or creature

for the dorg. And Dordogne the cartoonist, a bland little man except for the mad black eyes, was scared stupid by reports that the cartoon animal had actually been seen, alive and all.

It was then that there appeared, in *Primitive Arts Quarterly*, an off piece by the trilobal psychologist James Riddle. The piece was titled "Lascaux, Dordogne, and the Naming of the Animals." The essay contained this strange thesis:

"What happened in the cave art days of Lascaux was the 'Naming' of the Animals. The paintings were the namings, or at least they were an aspect of the namings. It must be understood that this was concurrent with the creative act. The depicted animals were absolutely new then. if the paleozoologists say otherwise, then the paleozoologists are wrong. The men also were absolutely new then.

"Some, perhaps all, of these cave paintings were anticipatory: the paintings appeared a slight time before the animals themselves appeared. My evidence for this is subjective, and yet I am as sure of this as I am of anything in the world. In several cases, the animals, when they appeared, did not quite conform to their depiction. In several other cases, owing I supposed to a geodetic accident, the corresponding animals failed to appear at all.

"It is certain that this art was anticipatory and prophetic, heralding the appearance of new species over the life horizon. It was precursor art, harbinger art. It is certain also that this art contained elements of effective magic; it is most certain that the species were of sudden appearance. The only thing not certain is just to what extent the paintings were creative of the animals. There is still fluid mystery about the mechanism of the sudden appearance of species. The paleontologists cannot throw any light on this mystery at all, and the biologists cannot. But the artist can throw light on it, and the psychologist can. It is clear that a new species appears, suddenly and completely developed, exactly when it is needed.

"And a new species is needed exactly now.

"It is for this reason that there is peculiar interest in a recent creation of the cartoonist Jasper Pendragon Dordogne. He has depicted a new species of animal. I do not believe that Dordogne realizes what he is doing. He isn't an intelligent man. I do not believe that the Lascaux cave painters realized what they were doing. But the art of J.P. Dordogne, like

that of the old cave painters, is anticipatory, it is prophetic, it is precursor art, harbinger art. The new species of animal will appear almost immediately, if it has not already appeared. The exact effect that the cartoonist will have on the appearing species we do not know. The effect that we may be able to have on the cartoonist will not be exact, but it can be decisive.

“Above all, let us see it happen, if this is at all possible. Let us witness the appearance of a new species for once. It should answer very many questions. It should give the final answer to that dreary and tedious remnant of evolutionists that still lingers in benighted areas. Let our hope and our effort be toward this being a permanent appearance. Very many of them have not been permanent.”

Adrian Durchbruch, the newly appointed Chief of Remedial Ecology, had read the James Riddle article in *Primitive Arts Quarterly* on his first day on the job. He immediately requisitioned the mad-eyed cartoonist J.P. Dordogne and the trilobal psychologist for his program. They were both referring to the animal that the world and the project were looking for. However the two men might have their information confused, they did seem to have information of a sort.

When Durchbruch incorporated himself and these other two men into his project, he also had to include a member of Amalgamated Youth to keep it legal. He accepted Annalouise Krug gladly. You should see what most members of Amalgamated Youth are like.

The reports of the actual sightings of the animal had come in immediately. And the four persons flew down to the area immediately.

Riddle landed the plane in tall grass near Talihina, Oklahoma, and the four dorg-seekers got out.

“We will immediately contact the local -authorities,” Adrian Durchbruch began as he bounded around on his feet on the springy ground, “and we will find whether —”

“On, shut up, Adrian,” Riddle said pleasantly. “This lady here knows where it can be found. If that were not so, I would have landed in some other place where a lady would know all about it. Time spent checking with authorities is always time lost. Where is the dorg, lady?”

“It went up in the high pasture this morning,” said the lady that was there. “It has been feeling so bad that we were worried about it. And you are the only one that knows what’s the matter with it. You, mad-eyes, I’m

talking to you. You know what is bothering it, don't you?"

"Gosh, I'm afraid I do," the cartoonist Dordogne grumbled sadly. "I've been afraid to say it or draw it, though. If it is true, then it will push me clear over the edge, and everyone says I haven't far to go. Don't let it happen! I don't want to be that crazy."

"My husband followed him up there a while ago," the lady said, "and he took his big Jim Bowie knife with him, in case we guessed right about it. They can't hardly do it by themselves, you know. They're not built for it. Oh, here they come now, and the little one is with them."

The man, and the big dorg (moving painfully), and the little dorg were coming down the slope.

"But the big dorg is male!" Annalouise Krug cried out in unbelief.

"Yes, they have such a hard time of it," the lady said. "There isn't any other way to get anything staricd, though."

The man and the big male dorg and the little female dorg came down to them.

"It wasn't much trouble," the man said. "He went to sleep."

"The Tardemah, the deep sleep," Riddle said reverently. "I should have guessed it."

"Then I cut him open and took her out of his side," the man said. "They will both be all right now."

"Bu Caesarean section," Annalouise mumbled. "Why didn't we all guess it?" There was a loud snapping noise. "What was that?" Adrian demanded, bouncing around.

"My mind just snapped," Dordogne said woozily. "I won't bother to keep up appearances any longer. Now I will be crazy with a clear conscience."

The little dorg was near grown within one month and was impregnated. In another mornh she produced a litter of ten. In another five weeks another, and in another five weeks still another. And the young ones produced at two months, and again in five weeks, and again in another five weeks. Quite soon there were a million of them, and then one hundred million, shipped all over the world wow. These were big cow-sized animals of excellent meat, and they ate only the rocks and waste hills where nothing had ever grown, turning it into fertile soil incidentally.

Soon there were a billion dorgs in the world ready for butchering, and

the numbers of them could be tapered off as soon as it seemed wise, and there was enough meat for everyone in the world.

“I have only one worry,” the trilobal psychologist James Riddle said as he met with Adrian Dirchbruch and Annalouise Krug in a self-congratulatory session. J.P. Dordogne the mad cartoonist was in a sanitarium now and was really mad. “I keep remembering a part of those cave paintings at Lascaux.”

“What were they, James?” Annalouise Krug asked. Annalouise was not so much in the fashion as she had once been. Well-fed nations somehow set their ideals on more svelte types.

“They were the crossed-out animals, the chiseled-over animals, the funny-looking animals. They are funny-looking to us only because we have never seen them in the flesh. They are the animals that did not survive. We don’t know why they did not. They were drawn originally with the same boldness as the rest of them.”

“We don’t know what the odds are,” Adrian said worriedly, forgetting to bounce. “We have no way at all to calculate them. It is so hard to take a census of things that aren’t. We will keep our fingers crossed and all fetishes working full time. Without primordial fetish there wouldn’t have been ally animals or people at all.”

It went on smoothly for a year and a day after the dorgs had struck their proper world balance. There was plenty of meat for everyone in the world, there were plenty of dorgs, and they had to be segregated to prevent their being too many.

Then the index of dorg fertility fell. The numbers of them were raised up past the safe level again only by unsegregating all flocks. The index fell again and continued to fall. It disappeared.

The last dorgs were born. There was breathless waiting to see if some of them might not be fertile. They weren’t. It was all over with, and the world wailing raised higher it had ever been.

“What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus, not the woeful stutterings of aged minds,” Annalouise Krug was saying. “Aren’t there any other animals that can live on rocks?”

“No,” Adrian Durchbruch said sadly.

“Where does the species male come from in the first place?” she asked.

“It appears for the first time on a Monday morning in a comic strip or

on a cave mural,” James Riddle said. “I believe it is something about the syndication that new formats in cartoons always appear on Monday mornings.”

“Before that, I mean. Where does the male come from?” Annalouise said.

“I don’t know,” Riddle groused.

“Well, somebody had better remember something right now,” Annalouise stated with a curious menace. “Riddle, what good does an extra lobe do you if you can’t remember something special? Come up with something, I say.”

“I can’t. There is nothing else to come up with,” Riddle said. But Annalouise picked the psychologist up and shook him till he near fell apart.

“Now remember something else,” she ordered.

“I can’t, Annalouise, there is nothing else to remember.”

“You have no idea how hard I will shake you if you don’t come up with something. “ She gave him an idea of just how hard she could shake him.

“Now!” she ordered.

“On, yes, since my life is on the line, I will remember something else,” Riddle moaned, with not much wind left in him. “There are others of those cave paintings that are most curious. Some of them are printed and carved over and over and over again, always in the same region. Most of them are of the common animals of today. Did it come that close, do you think, with even the common ones of them? One at least (and this gives me some hope) was a common animal of today that had been crossed out as having failed. But someone was not content to let it remain crossed out. It was redrawn with great emphasis. And then redrawn and expanded again and again, always in the same region. “

“Let’s go to Dordogne right now with plenty of drawing materials,” Adrian snapped.

“But Dordogne is crazy,” Annalouise cried. “Always in what same region, Adrian?”

“We’re crazy, too, to think of it,” Adrian hooted, “but let’s go to him right now.”

“What region, James?” Annalouise insisted. “Always drawn over and over again in what same region?”

“The belly. Let’s go to Dordogne.”

They had Dordogne on his feet and drawing dorgs so pregnant that their bellies drug the gromid. He was dazed, though, and sniffing.

“When you’ve drawn one pregnant dorg you’ve drawn them all,” he whimpered.

But they kept him at it. He collapsed, but thy jerked him back to the task again. Who knows which may be the quickening stroke? “On your feet, Dordogne,” they yelled, “Do it one more time!”

## **AND NOW WALK GENTLY THROUGH THE FIRE**

“The Ichtyans or Queer Fish are the oddest species to be found in any of the worlds. They are pseudo-human, perhaps, but not android. The sign of the fish is not easily seen on them, and they pass as human whenever they wish: a peculiarity of them is that they often do not wish to pass as human even when their lives depend on it. They have blood in their veins, but an additional serum also. It’s only when the organizational sickness is upon them (for these organizing and building proclivities they are sometimes known as the Queer Builders or the Ants of God), that they can really be told from humans. There is also the fact that most of them are very young, or at least of a youthful appearance. Their threat to us is more real than apparent and we tend to minimize it. This we must not do. In our unstructured, destructed, destroyed society, they must be counted as the enemies to be exterminated. It’s a double danger they offer us: to fight them on their own grounds, or to neglect to fight them. They’d almost trick us into organizing to hunt down their organization.

“Oh, they can live near as loosely as ourselves in their deception. These builders can abandon buildings in their trickery. They’ll live in tents, they’ll live in huts, they’ll live under the open sky as easily as do ourselves, the regular people. But observe (they trick us there again: observation is a quality of theirs, not of ours), notice that everything they do is structured. There is always something structured about their very tents; there is something peculiarly structured about their butts; they even maintain that there is something structured about the open sky. They are the Institutional People.

“The Queer Fish claim that Gaea (Earth) is the most anciently peopled of the worlds and that they themselves are the most ancient people. But they set their own first appearance in quite late times, and they contradict the true ancientness of humans and proto-humans.

“The Queer Fish have been bloody and warlike in their times. They have been Oceanic as well as Sky-Faring, in some cases beyond ourselves in that phase. They have even been, in several peculiar contexts, creative. They are not now creative in the arts (they do not even recognize the same arts as we do). They are certainly not creative in the one remaining genuine art, that of unstructured music. They are something much worse



than creative now: they are procreative in the flesh. Their fishy flesh would have already become dominant if they hadn't been ordered hinted to extinction. Even in this they force us to come out of ourselves, to use one of their own words.

"They force us to play their game. We have to set up certain structures ourselves to effect their destruction. We even need to institute certain movements and establishments to combat their Institutionalism and Establishmentalism. They are, let us put it plainly, the plague-carriers. Shall we, the Proud Champions of the Destroyed Worlds, have to abandon a part of our thesis to bring about their unstructuring, their real destruction? Must we take unseemly means to balk their fishy plague? We must."

"Problem of the Queer Fish."

Analects. - The Putty Dwarf

Judy Thatcher was moving upcountry in a cover of cattle. The millions of feral cattle were on all the plains. Most of these cattle were wobble-eyed and unordered. But an ordered person, such as Judy, would have ordered cattle; she could draw them about her like with a sense of structure a cloak, whole droves of them. A person could manipulate whole valleys of these cattle, could turn them (the smaller units turning the larger), could head them any way required, could use them for concealment or protection, could employ their great horned phalanxes as a threat. Judy Thatcher had some hundreds of her own ordered bulls. Being magic (she was one of the Twelve) she could manipulate almost anything whatsoever.

But most of the cattle of the plains were not quite cattle, were not ordered cattle. Most of the horses were not quite horses, nor the dogs dogs. Most of the people were no longer quite people (this from the viewpoint of the Queer Fish; Judy was a Queer Fish).

Judy was a young and handsome woman of rowdy intellect. She had, by special arrangement, two eyes outside of her head, and these now traveled on the two horizons. These eyes were her daughter, traveling now about two miles to the East and right of her on a ridge, and her son moving on another ridge three miles to her left and West. She was a plague carrier, she and hers. All three of them were Queer Fish.

The son, on her West and left, worked along a North-running ridge in those high plains and he could scan the filled plain still farther to the

West. He could mark every disordered creature on that plain, and he had also been marking for some time one creature that was wrongly ordered but moving toward him with a purpose.

This son, Gregory, was twelve years old. Being of that age, he knew it was time for a certain encounter. He knew that the creature, wrongly ordered and moving towards him with a purpose, would be a party to that encounter. This always happens to boys of that age, when they are of the ripe time for the Confirmation or the Initiation of whatever sort. Many boys, unstructured boys, amazed boys of the regular species, boys of the Queer Fish even, are not conscious of the encounter when it comes. It may come to them so casually that they miss its import. It may come as wobble-eyed as themselves and they accept it without question. It may even come to them in dream state (whether in waking or walking dream, or in night dream), and then it sinks down, yeasting and festering a little bit but not really remembered, into their dream underlay. But many boys, particularly those of the Queer Fish species, know it consciously when it comes, and they negotiate with it.

(As to the ritual temptation of girls, that is of another matter, and perhaps it is of earlier or later years. Any information must come from a girl, or from a woman who remembers when she was a girl. Many do not seem to remember it at all. Most will deny it. Some will talk around it, but they do not talk of it directly. You may find an exceptional one who will. You may be an exceptional one who knows about it. But it isn't in the records.)

Gregory Thatcher, being twelve years old and in his wits, was tempted by a devil on a high spot on that ridge. There had been a cow, a white-eyed or glare-eyed cow, coming blindly towards him. The cow had no order or purpose, but someone in the cow came on purpose. Then the cow was standing, stock-still, blind-still, too stupid to graze, too balkish to collapse, less animate than a stone cow. Whoever had been in her had come out of her now. Where was he?

There was a little flicker of black lightning, a slight snigger, and he was there.

“Command that these stones be made bread,” he said (his heart not quite in it). He was a minor devil; his name was Azazel. He wasn't the great one of that name, but one of the numerous nephews. There is an economy of names among the devils.

“Does it always have to start with those same words?” Gregory asked him.

“That’s the way the rubric runs, boy,” Azazel jibed. “You Fish are strong on rubric yourselves, you’re full of it. Play the game.”

“We are the rubric,” Gregory said easily, “in the first meaning, the red meaning. We’re the red ocher, the red earth.”

“A smart Fish I have, have I? You heard the words ‘Command that these stones be made bread.’ Do it, or confess that you are unable to do it. You Fish claim powers.”

“It is easy enough to make bread with these stones,” said Gregory. “Even you can see that they are all roughly quern stones, grinding stones. They are all flat or dished limestones and almost any two will fit together. And the wild wheat stands plentiful and in full head. It’s easy enough to thresh it out by rubbing the ears in my hands, to grind it to meal or to flour between your stones, to mix with water from my flask and salt from my pack, to build a fire of cow chips and make bread cakes on one of the flat rocks put to cap the fire. I’ve dined on this twice today. I’d dine with you on it now if fraternizing were allowed.”

“It isn’t, Greg. You twist the words. They are ‘Command that these stones be made bread,’ not ‘Command that these stones make bread.’ You fail it.”

“I fail nothing, Azazel.” (The two of them seemed about the same age, but that was not possible.) “You’ll not command me to cornmand. On with it, though.”

“Cast thyself down from this height,” Azazel ordered. “If you are one of the elect you’ll not be dashed to pieces by it.”

“I’ll not be dashed to pieces yet. It’s high but not really steep. Not a good selection, Azazel.”

“We work with what we are given. The final one then — the world and all that is in it —.” Here Azazel went into a dazzle. He was real enough, but now he went into contrived form and became the *Argyros Daimon*, the Silver Demon who was himself a literary device and diversion. He waved a shimmering silvery band. “The world and all that is in it, all this I will give you, if —.” Then they both had to laugh.

“It isn’t much of a world you have to offer,” Greg Thatcher grinned. “Really, where is the temptation?”

“It doesn’t look like much,” Azazel grinned. “Oh the temptation is

quite real, but it's subtle and long-term. It's quite likely that you'll be had by it, Greg. Almost all are had by it along the way. You can see it as wheat-colored, or as green-grass colored, or as limestone and dust, or as shimmering. It isn't a simple world, and you haven't seen it all. Already you love it, and you believe you have it. You haven't it yet, not till I give it to you. You're a stranger on it. And you're blind to its main characteristic."

"What characteristic am I blind to?"

"The surface name of it is freedom."

"I have the ordered sort of freedom now," Gregory said rather stiffly. The Odd Fish have always had this somewhat stiff and pompous and superior way of setting forth their views. Whether it is a strength or a weakness is disputed but it is essential to them. They'd not be the Odd Fish without it. "Have you Freedom in Hell?" he groi asked Azazel. "Have you Order there?"

"Would we offer you something we don't have ourselves?" Azazel asked with his own pomposity. (The Devils and the Odd Fish both have this stilted way of talking, and they have other similarities, but in most ways they are quite different.) "Certainly we have Freedom, with the same Freedom that all others have on Earth, the Freedom that an you Queer Fish deny yourselves. And Order, here you touch us in a sore spot, Greg. It is here that we offer you a little more than we do have ourselves, for we offer you freedom from order. Aye, regretably we suffer order of a sort, but you needn't. There's a line in one of the old poets of your own Queer Fish species: 'They order things bel so damnably in Hell.' He's right, in his way. There is a damnable order still surviving there.

"Let me explain something to you though, Greg. Let me ask you a favor. I'll even appeal to the 'good side' of you. You Queer Fish make much of that 'good side' business. If I am able to disorder you, by that same measure I am allowed to escape into disorder myself. I've made good progress in my time. I've disordered very many. Look not at me like that! You are almost critical of me. I want you. You're to a great prize." (The Queer Fish are almost as susceptible to flattery as are the Devils themselves, and Gregory had flushed slightly from thi pleasure.)

"But I have it all, the world and its fruits," he explained to Azazel. "And I have things that are beyond the world. I walk in light."

"Here's a pair of blued sunglasses you can use then, Greg. The light is

always over-bright. You haven't it all. You're afraid of so much of it. I'll take away your fear. All flesh is grass, it is said by some old authority, I forget whether by one of yours or ours. Why do you refuse the more spirited grasses and bemps then? Even the cattle know enough to enjoy them."

"The wobble-eyed cattle and the wobble-eyed people are on the loco. I'll not be on it."

"Come along with our thing, Greg, and we'll help both ourselves into Freedom and Disorder. You can have it the other way also: All grass is flesh. What flesh!"

The things that Azazel demonstrated were fleshy in the extreme. They were like old pictures, but they came on multidimensional and musky and writing. Whereever the creatures came from white-eyed cows that were not quite cows or out of the ground that was not quite ground Greg did not know. Perhaps they were not more than surrogate projections. What then of those whose lives were no more than surrogate projections, they of the great disordered majority?

"They have so much, Greg," Azazel said, "and you miss it all."

Gregory Thatcher broke the whole complex of devices to pieces with a shattering laugh. It was a nervous laugh though. Gregory had an advantage. He was young, he was only twelve, and he was not precocious. (But from this day on it couldn't be said that he was not precocious. In that complex instant he was older by a year; he was as old as Azazel now.)

"I'll not say 'Get thee behind me, Satan' for I wouldn't trust you behind me for one stride," Gregory laughed. "I will say 'Get they back into thy cow and be off' for I now perceive that the white-eyed cow there is no cow at all but only a device and vehicle of yourse. Into it and be gone, Azazel."

"Greg, boy, think about these things," Azazel spoke as a knowing young fellow to one even younger and not quite so knowing. "You will think about them in any case. I've been talking to you on various levels, and not all my speech has been in words and not all meant to enter by the ears. Parts of it have gone into you by other orifices and they will work in you in your lower parts. Ah, some of those things of mine were quite good. I regret that you refuse the savor of them in your proper consciousness and senses, but they'll be with you forever. We've won it all, Greg. Join it. You don't want to be with the losers."

“You worry and fret as though you’d not quite one it, Azazel,” Gregory mocked. “Into your vehicle and be off now. The show wasn’t really as well done as I expected.”

“The show isn’t over with, boy,” Azazel said.

There had been a white-eyed cow standing, stock-still, blind-still, too stupid to graze, less animate than a stone cow, an empty cow skin standing uncollapsed.

There had been a teen-aged devil named Azazel, sometimes in a silver dazzle, sometimes in a blue funk, who had talked in words for the ears and in non-words for other entry.

Then there was only one of them. With a laugh, the devil disappeared into the white-eyed cow and she became quite animate. She whistled, she did a little cross-legged dance, she skittered off, blind and bounding. She was full of loco weed as were almost all the creatures of these plains. Aye, and she was full of the devil, too.

And how was one to distinguish an artificial and vehicular cow from a real one? All the cows now looked artificial. They had become like great spotted buffalo in their going feral. They were humpbacked now and huge, wild and wooly, except that they were mostly somnambulistic and stumbling, with an inner pleasure, perhaps, or an inner vacuity.

And the horses of the plains also. What was the tired weirdness about the horses?

And the dogs. However had the dogs become undogged? How is a dog disarticulated?

And the people. They were unpersoned and perverse now. They all shared a secret, and the secret was that they were a shared species with few individuals among them.

Cows, horses, dogs, people, the four artificial species. Now strange contrivances had spouted out of them all and recombined in them. They were all wobble-eyed, white-eyed, vacant-eyed, and freakish. Except the Queer Fish. The Queer Fish Gregory Thatcher whistled, and the birds whistled and called back to him. How had the birds been spared? Meadow Larks, Scissor Tails, Mockingbirds, they all still used structured music.

The Queer Fish Gregory had been noticing movement in the center plains where his mother Judy had been traveling. The movement did not seem to constitute a threat. Some dozen of the ordered bulls of Judy

Thatcher had surrounded a creature. They escorted him down into the center of the valley; they escorted him with a benign throating and bellowing. So it was a visitor to them, and not a hostile visitor. It was possibly one of the Seventy-Two, or one of the looser penumbra. Gregory stood and waited a moment for the signal. It came. The two eyes that Judy Thatcher had outside of her head she called in to her now. Gregory went down into the valley from its west slope. His sister was descending from the opposite rampart.

2

“We owe so much to one phrase that we can hardly express it. Without it, we’d have had to invent a phrase, we’d have put a modicum of meaning into it (overestimating the intelligence of the people as we have done so many times), and we’d have failed and failed and failed again. One smiles to recall that phrase that our fathers accidentally stumbled on and which later came back to us a hundredfold like bread cast upon the waters: ‘I am all for relevant religion that is free and alive and where the action is, but institutional religion turns me off.’ Incredible? Yes. A hog, if he could speak, wouldn’t make so silly a statement: a blind mole wouldn’t. And yet this statement was spoken many millions of times by young human persons of all ages. How lucky that it had been contrived, how mind boggling that it was accepted. It gave us victory without battle and success beyond our dreams.

“It was like saying ‘I love animals, all animals, every part of them: it is only their flesh and their bones that I object to; it is only their living substance that turns me off.’ For it is essential that religion (that old abomination) if it is to be religion at all (the total psychic experience) must be institutionalized and articulated in organization and service and liturgy and art. That is what religion is. And everything of a structured world, housing and furniture and art and production and transportation and organization and communication and continuity and mutuality is the institutional part of religion. That is what culture is. There can no more be noninstitutional religion than there can be a bodiless body. We abjure the whole business. We’re well quit of the old nightmare.

“What was, or rather what would have been, the human species? It was, would have been, the establishment of a certain two-legged animal. This had never been done of any species, and by a very narrow margin it was not done in this case. It would have been Structuring and

Organization and Institution erected where such things had never been done before. It would have been the realization of worlds where worlds had not been before. It would have been the building of the 'Sky Bucket' for containing and shaping humanity. And if that 'Sky Bucket' should actually have been build and filled to the brim, the human race would have appeared; and it would have been transcendent. The first requirement of the 'Human' is that it should be more than human. Again, we abjure the whole business. We'd rather remain unstructured monkeys.

"Fortunately we have halted it, before critical mass could have been achieved, before even the bottom of the 'Sky Bucket' was covered with the transcendent flowing that might have become human. We have succeeded in unmaking the species before it well appeared. And a thing unmade once is unmade forever, both as to its future and its past. There never was a 'Sky Bucket;' there never was a transcendent flowing; there never was a structured human race or even the real threat of one.

"Our surviving enemies are slight ones, the plague-carrying Queer Fish and others of their bias. We'll have them down also, and then it will be the case that they never were up, that they never were at all. We have already disjointed the majority of them and separated them from their basis. And when they have become disjointed and destructed and disestablished, they become like ourselves in their coprophility and in their eruption against order.

"We have won it. We have unmade the species. We have created the case that it has never been. We have carried out our plan to the end that there never need be any sort of plan again. We have followed our logic to its conclusion. The logical conclusion of the destructing process 's illogic. So we had intended it to be. So we have now achieved it." The Unmaking of the Species. Analities. — The Coprophilous Monkey

The visitor was a long, lean, young man who had been put through the torture. He was close cropped and bare faced and he wore only that day's dirt and dust. He was washing now in the shallow stream. Gregory gave him soap made of bull fat and potash, and he took the visitor's clothes from him for strongest washing.

The visitor had made his request from Judy Thatcher before Gregory's arrival. She had felt a sudden fear at it, but she put it away from her. Now Judy, the mother and magic person, was writing a letter. She wrote on a great flat stone that providentially would serve her for table and desk and



for a third function. Why should the stone not serve her providentially? Judy was a child of Providence.

Trumpet Thatcher, the daughter of Judy, the sister of Gregory, had called a horse. This was an ordered horse (there were still a few such), and not one of the wobble eyed not-quite-horses of the plains. Being an ordered animal, of its nature it obeyed her orders, and she rode it freely across the valley.

“He has not been followed, not closely at least,” Judy Thatcher called to her daughter, looking up from her writing. “The danger is not now. The danger is tomorrow, after he has left us for a while, when he may fall in with the destructed ones who have followed him (but not closely), when he might bring them, if he is of the treason.”

“Nevertheless, I will ride and look,” the girl named Trumpet called. And she rode and looked.

The long, lean, young man seemed uneasy at the speculation that he might belong to the treason. He was tired eyed, but he was not yet truly wobble eyed. He was wordless and not quite open, but he seemed to have a sanity about him. That he was of the torture meant nothing; he might still be of the treason.

He had been lashed and gashed and burned and broken, that was true. It had been done to him in other years, and it had also been done to him recently, within a week. But had he been burned and gashed and broken for the Faith?

Many of the unstructured persons now tortured themselves or had themselves tortured, sometimes to try to stir their tired sensations, sometimes out of mere boredom. It was a last sensation of those who had sensationalized everything. But the threshold of pain of those tired ones who had almost disappeared; the most severe pain would hardly stir them from their drowse. It wasn't the same with them as if an alive and responding person were tortured.

The tired-eyed young man said that he was named Brother Ampirropos. He had come to Judy Thatcher, one of the Twelve, and asked for a Letter. This she could not refuse, even if the giving of it meant her life. She gave the letter now, and perhaps her life, with great sweeps of writing in a rowdy hand out of a rowdy mind. She was a special figure. Two thousand years ago she'd have been a male figure and yet that is not quite correct. The Twelve, in their office, had always been

hermaphrodites for God. SO was Judy in her special moments.

Yet she wrote with difficulty, for all the free-handed sweep of her writing. There are things hard to write, there are things impossible. She dipped her calaniary pen in lampblack and in grace and wrote to somebody or something that might no longer be in existence.

Gregory had cleaned up the visitor and his clothes. The visitor rested on cool stones by the stream. He was wordless, he was almost eyeless, he gave out no confidence at all. It would have been so easy to slay him and bury him there under the cottonwoods and then be off a few quick miles before dark. He had no papers, he had no recommendations. He knew the Sign of the Fish, but there had been something unaccustomed and awkward about his way of giving it.

Gregory had gathered a quantity of wild wheat. He threshed it between the palms of his hands, keeping the good grains, blowing the awns and glumes of chaff away. He threshed a good quantity of it. He ground it between quern stones which were naturally about on the plain, ground it fine to flour for the small bread, and coarse to meal for the large bread. He built a fire of cow chips, put a flat capstone or oven stone over the fire on which to bake the two breads. The small bread (which, however, is larger than the world) he mixed with water only and put it, unsalted and without leaven, on the oven stone. The large, or meal bread, was salted and leavened and kneaded with cow milk, and was then let to rise before it was set on the stone to bake.

Trumpet Thatcher, fine eyed and proud, returned from her circuit ride. Her good eyes had missed nothing, neither flight of birds nor cloud of dust nor unusual drifting of cattle as far as any of the distant horizon that could be seen from the highest ridges. There was no enemy within three hours' ride of them, none within seven hours' walk, and the stranger, Brother Amphirropos, had come on foot. Or had he come on foot? Trumpet Thatcher, a strong and freckled girl, was now freckled with blood and it was not her own. She took a packet to the stranger.

"It is yours," she said. "You will need it when you leave." It was a small, heavy saddlebag, but she handled it as if it were light. And the stranger went white faced and kept silent.

Trumpet set to work to dig a pit. She was a strong girl, two years older than Gregory, and she dug easily. Also she dug with a queer humor. The pit should have been nearly square but she made it long and narrow.

Sometimes she looked at the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos as though measuring him with her eyes, and he became very nervous.

“It is long enough and deep enough,” she said after a while. Indeed it was long enough and deep enough to serve as grave for this stranger if it were intended for such. Trumpet put cow chips in the bottom of the pit and set fire to them. Then she put in wood from felled cottonwood and sycamores that lined the stream. It gradually grew to a rousing hot fire.

Judy Thatcher looked up and grinned at the shape of the pit her daughter had made, at the joke she had been playing. And Judy became a little more serious when she observed the shaken appearance of Brother Amphirropos.

“It is time,” Judy Thatcher said then. She set her writing to one side of the providential flat rock, that rowdy looping screed on which she had been laboring so seriously. She brought the small bread to the providential rock. She also set out water and wild wine from gone-feral grapes.

“Brother Amphirropos, is there something you should say to me or I to thee, either apart, or before my two?” she asked clearly.

“No,” the Stranger-Brother said shortly.

“We begin it then,” Judy declared. Her two children and the Stranger-Brother gathered around her. She said ordered words. She did ordered things. She structured, she instituted, she transformed. She and they (including the strange Brother Amphirropos) consumed and consummated. The small bread and the small wine were finished. Judy washed her hands with the small water and then poured it into the porous earth. She returned then, smiling and powerful, to her writing.

Trumpet Thatcher put the large bread on to bake.

Gregory ordered a young bull of six months to come. It came, it nuzzled him, it was an ordered young bull and a friend. It went down before him, on forecknees first as though kneeling to him, but that is the way cattle go down. Then down with its high haunches also and on the ground before him. It rolled its head far back into the bulging of its hump. Gregory and the young bull looked eye to eye. Then Gregory cut its throat with a whetted knife.

They strung the young bull up on a tripod of cottonwood poles. Trumpet understood how to aid in this. Brother Amphirropos didn't quite. He was clumsy and unaccustomed to such labor, but they

managed. They skinned the animal down. They cut and separated. They set portions of fat aside. They put large parts of ribs and rump into the burning pit to be seared and roasted.

Trumpet made a frame of poles meanwhile. She cut a great quantity of bull meat into long narrow strips and put them on the pole frame to dry in the wind and the smoke. She did other things with other parts of the animal, set aside in crocks blood that she had drawn and further fat. The great intestine and the stomach she had out and everted. She washed them seven times in the stream, using lime, ochre mixed with bone ash (from the bull's own bone), gypsum, soap, soda, natron, and salt in the water for the seven washings.

The large bread was finished. Trumpet Thatcher brought it to the broad providential stone. They had butter and honey with it. Gregory brought aromatic roasts from the burning pit. They cut and broke and feasted, the four of them. They had cider and small wine. They had milk and cheesc. They had blackberries and sand plums and feral grapes. They had sour cider for sauce. They feasted for quite a while.

Two coyotes came and begged and were fed. They could have all the small meat they wanted on the plains, but they loved the big meat that had been roasted.

"Will you be staying the night?" Trumpet Thatcher asked the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos.

"No he will not," Judy the mother answered for the stranger. "He must be gone very soon, as soon as we have finished, and I have finished."

"I'll make him a sling of provender then," Trumpet said. She cut a length of the bull's intestine and knotted it. She took strips of the beef that had been wind-drying and smoke-drying and sizzled them in the fire of the pit. She stuffed the length of intestine with them. She melted fat and poured it in with the meat, added honey and berries and grapes, scaled it with more fat, and knotted it finally with the second knot. It was a twenty pound length.

"Take it with you," Trumpet told him.

"I'll have no need for a great thing like that," the Stranger-Brother protested.

"You may have need," Gregory growled. "The treason cuts both ways. You may have to ride hard and fast when it is accomplished, or when it has failed. You can live on that for a very long time. I doubt if your days,

will near come to the end of it. Mother, a're you not finished yet?"

"Yes, I am finished. It's a short and inept thing, but it may carry its own grace."

This was the letter (it was titled Epistle to the Church of Omaha in Dispersal):

"To you who are scattered and broken, gather again and mend. Rebuild always, and again I say rebuild. Renew the face of the earth. It is a loved face, but now it is covered with the webs of tired spiders.

"We are in a post-catastrophe world, and yet the catastrophes did not happen. There are worse things than catastrophes. There is the surrender of the will before even the catastrophes come. There are worse things than war. There are worse things even than unjust war: unjust peace or crooked peace is worse. To leave life by withdrawal is worse than to leave life by murder. To be bored of the world is worse than to shed all the blood in the world. There are worse things than final Armageddon. Being too tired and wobble eyed for final combat is worse. There are things worse than lust — the sick surrogates of lust are worse. There are things worse than revolution — the half-revolution, the mere turning away, is worse.

"Know that religion is a repetitious act or it is nothing. The 're' is the holy prefix, since nothing is successful the first time. It must be forever the 're,' the returning, the restructuring, the re-lexion, the reconstitution, the building back from defeat. We will rebuild in the dark and in the light; we will work without ceasing.

"Even our mysterious Maker was the Re-deemer, the re-doomer who wrangles for us a second and better doom, the ransomer, the re-buyer, the re-demptor. We are sold and we are ransomed, we are lost and we are found. We are dead and we are resurrected, which is to say 'Surged up again.'

"You ask me about the Parousia, the second coming. This has been asked from the beginning. There was urgent expectation of it in the beginning. Then, in the lifetimes of those first ones, there came a curious satisfaction, as though the coming had been experienced anew, as though it were a constant and almost continuing thing. Perhaps there has been a second coming, and a third, and a three hundredth. Perhaps, as the legend has it, it comes every sabbatical, every seventh year. I do not know. I was not of the chosen at the time of the last sabbatical. We are in

the days of a new one, but I know now I will not be alive for the day of it.

“Be steadfast. Rebuild, restructure, reinstitute, renew.”

‘X-Dmo. Judy Thatcher (one of the Twelve).

Judy had read the epistle aloud in a clear voice. Now she folded it, scaled it, and gave it to the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos.

“What thou doest do quickly,” she said.

“Here is horse,” Gregory said, “for your horse that my sister Trumpet killed. It was deception for you to leave your horse a distance apart and come to us on foot. No, worry not. You’ll not need saddle or bridle. He is an ordered horse, and we order him to take you where you will. Take up your saddlebag and your bull-gut sling with you and be gone.”

The Strange-Brother mounted horse, took the bag and the sling, looked at them with agonized eyes, almost made as if to speak. But whatever words he had he swallowed in his throat. He turned horse and rode away from them. He carried the letter with him.

3

“It worries us a little that our victories were too easy, that the world fell down before it had hardly been pushed. We have our results and we should rejoice, but we have them so easily that the salt and the sulphur are missing from our rejoicing. There is a lack of elegance in all that we have accomplished. Elegance, of course, was the first thing of which we deprived the humans, but we rather liked it in the small group that was ourselves. It’s gone now. It was only a little extra thing in any case, and our own thesis is that there must be none of these little extra things.

“We intended to have our way in the post-cataclysmic world. We do have our way now and the world has all the predicted marks of the post-cataclysmic world, but the cataclysm did not happen. Since our whole objective was for flatness in all things, perhaps we were wrong to expect grandeur in the execution. Ah, but all the fabled mountains of the world were deflated so easily as to leave us unsatisfied. They were made of empty air, and the air has gone out of them.

“The Queer Fish have the saying that the Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds came and walked upon this world in historical time; that he will come again; that, perhaps, he has already come again and again.

“Let us set up the counter saying: that the Mysterious Masters and Unmakers of the Worlds (Ourselves) walk upon this world now; that we

diminish it as we walk upon it; that we will not leave a stone upon a stone remaining of it.

“How is a person or a world unmade or unformed? First by being deformed. And following the deforming is the collapsing. The tenuous balance is broken. Insanity is introduced easily under the name of the higher sanity. Then the little candle that is in each head is blown out on the pretext that the great cosmic light can be seen better without it. Then we introduce what we used to call, in our then elegant style, Lady Narkos, Lady Porno, Lady Krotos, Lady Ephialtes, and Lady Hypnos; or Dope, Perversion, Discordant Noise, Nightmare or Bad Trip, and Contrived Listlessness or Sleep. We didn’t expect it to work so easily, but it had been ripening for a long while.

“The persons and the worlds were never highly stable. A cross member is removed here on the pretext of added freedom. Foundation blocks are taken away on the pretext of change. Supporting studs are pulled down on the pretext of new experience. And none of the entities had ever been supported more strongly than was necessary. What happens then? A man collapses, a town, a city, a nation, a world. And it is hardly noticed.

“The cataclysm has been and gone. The cataclysm was the mere gnawing away of critical girders and rafters by those old rodents, ourselves. And who are we? The Queer Fish say that we are unclean spirits. We aren’t; perhaps we are unclean materialities. We do not know or care what we are. We are the Unmakers, and we have unmade our own memories with the rest of it. We forget and we are forgotten.

“There was no holocaust, there was no war, there was no predicted overcrowding or nature fouling. The nature fouling came later, from undercrowding. Parts of the cities still stand. Certain diminished black tribes are said still to inhabit their jungles. But, though it has been only thirty years, nobody remembers what the cities really were or who built them.

“We discovered that most persons were automatic, that they operated, as it were, by little winders. One had only to wind them up and they’d say ‘That’s where the action is, that’s where the action is,’ and then they’d befoul themselves. And to these little people winders there was always a mechanism release. When tired of playing with the mechanical people, we pushed the release. And the people were then rundown, inoperative,

finished.”

The Destroying of the World. Aphorisms — The Jester King

It was late in the day after the Stranger-Brother left them.

“Let us flame the fire high,” Gregory said, “that they may think we are still here. Then, when full dark comes, let us take horse and ride South to reverse our direction: or better, go West whree there has been no show of action.”

“I have not been told to go anywhere beyond this place,” Judy said doubtfully. “Besides, we do not know for sure that it is the treason.”

“Of course it is the treason!” Trumpet Thatcher affirmed. “But I do hope he gets clear of them after he has betrayed you and us. I’ve never liked their treason that cuts both ways. Why must they always kill the traitor as well as the betrayed? From his eyes, though, I don’t believe that he wants to get clear of them.”

“What are you waiting for, mother?” Gregory asked.

“For Levi, I think,” Judy said doubtfully, dreamily.

“And who is Levi?”

“I really don’t know. I believe he is just Levi from over the sea.”

“Is there to be a meeting?” Gregory asked. “Are you to be a part of it?”

“There is to be a meeting, I think. I do not believe now that I will be a part of it. I will be dead.”

“Well, have you any instructions at all for Trumpet and for myself,” Gregory asked, “what we should do?”

“None at all,” Judy admitted. “It goes blank. I am out of it soon.”

“Should we not at least flame the fires and then move maybe two miles North under the dark?” Gregory asked. “We should not be completely sitting prey.”

“All right,” Judy said. “We’ll go a ways, but not far yet.” But she seemed listless as though it had indeed ended with her.

They flamed their fires to mark their old position. They packed meat into slings to carry with them. They burned the remnants of the young bull in the flaming pit then. They moved maybe two miles North. Judy gave instructions to a dozen of the big, horned, ordered bulls. Then Judy and Trumpet bedded down for the night.

Gregory took horse and rode in the night, anywhere, everywhere. As a Queer Fish, Gregory had now come of age on the plains, but he was still a twelve-year-old boy whose personal memory did not go back to any of the



great events.

The Day of the Great Copout had been thirty years before. Even Gregory's mother Judy had nothing but scant childhood memories of the days before the Copout. The legends and the facts of that event had now parted company considerably, but it had always been more legend than fact to it. The only fact was that the human race had one day slipped a cog; that it had fallen down from the slight last push, though it had withstood much more severe buffeting. The fact was that the race now built no more and sustained no more, that it had let the whole complexity run down and then looked uncomprehending at the stalled remnant of it.

The legend was that the Day of Freedom arrived for everyone, and that thereafter nobody would ever work at all. The people were very heroic in their refusal to work, and many of them starved for it. Their numbers fought in the cities (always under the now universal peace symbol) for what food and goods could be found there. Their greatly diminished numbers then moved into the countrysides which had for a long time been choked with their sad abundance. Every grain elevator was full to bursting, every feed lot and pasture had its animals to excess. Every haybarn and corncrib was full.

Before the Day of the Great Copout the population had already greatly diminished. In the Americas it was less than a third of what it had been a century before. In other lands it was down variously. The world had already begun to fall apart a bit (being so alike everywhere there was not much use in keeping up communication between the like parts) and to diminish in quality (why run if no one is chasing you?).

But the Day of the Great Copout was worldwide. As though at a given signal (but there had been no signal) people in every city and town and village and countryside of earth dropped their tools and implements and swore that they would work no more. Officials, and paper shufflers ceased to officiate and to shuffle paper. Retailers closed up and retailed no more. Distributors no longer distributed. Producers produced nothing. The clock of the people stopped although some had believed that the hour was still early.

The Last Day had been, according to some.

"The Last Day has not been," said a prophet. "They will know it when it has been."

There was a little confusion at first. Though distributors no longer

distributed nor retailers retailed, still they objected to their stores and stocks being looted. There was bad feeling and bloodshed over this, and the matter was never settled at all.

The law people had all resigned from the law; and every congress and assembly in the world stood adjourned indefinitely or forever. There were, for a while, new assemblies and gatherings, freely chosen and freely serving, but these quickly fell apart and left nothing in their places but random gangs.

Minorities of odd people resisted the disintegration for a while, becoming more odd and more minor in their exceptions. The Crescent Riders kept up a little order for some years in the older parts of the world, not really laboring, looting just enough that the art be not forgotten; still keeping leaders who looked a little like leaders. The Ruddy Raiders maintained that there was nothing wrong with rape and arson so long as it was done as fun and not labor. The Redwinged Blackbirds and the Mandarins held together here and there.

And among certain groups that had always been considered peculiar, The Witnesses, the Maccabees, the Queer Fish, the Copout had not been complete. Certain numbers of these folks, somewhere between five and ten percent of them, resisted the Freakout, the Copout, the Freedom Day. These minorities of minorities had the compulsion to continue with their building, their ordering, their planting, creating, procreating.

This caused a disturbance in the New Free World. Groups should not be free to reject Free Think. So these remnants were hunted down. Even though it was against the new ways of the Free World, a certain organization was necessary for the hunts.

Most of that had passed now. Most of everything had passed. After thirty years had rolled by, the Free People of the world had become pretty old, pretty old and pretty crabby. Though most of the males among them still wore the beards of their boyhood and youth, yet they had aged in every way. They hadn't been reproducing themselves to any great extent; and the most of them hadn't really been so very young when the Great Day had come and gone. The cult of youth had become a bit senile.

There were still some populations in the cities. The cities have always been built on the best lands of the country and have always occupied the best river bottoms and river junctions. There was good fishing, there was good grazing on the new grass that shattered the pavements and

sidewalks, on the open places which became still more open, there was good fuel of several sorts, there were buildings remaining that were still tight enough to give year-round protection.

But most of the folks were in the countryside now. The special grasses and hems and poppies necessary to the Free Culture had long been established and abundant; they were in the cities and the countries and the fringe areas. In the country were millions upon millions of now feral-cattle to be had for easy killing. Wheat and corn still grew of themselves, rougher and more ragged every year, but still more than sufficient. The scattered crops would apparently outlast the diminished people, the disappearing human race.

What children and young people there were now belonged, much beyond their expected percentages, to the peculiar groups. Children also showed some tendency to join these peculiar of the regular people groups. It was almost the case that any young person was now suspect. It was quite rare that any young one should really adhere to the Free People. There had even come the anomalous situation (to one who remembered the earlier days and the earlier slogans) that beards were now more typical of old men than of boys.

Such was the world. So had it been for thirty years, for the Freedom Era.

“But there is always hope,” Judy Thatcher (and John Thatcher before her) used to preach. “Never has there been so much room for hope, never so great a vacuum waiting to be filled by it. Hope is a substance that will fill a vessel of any shape, even the convoluted emptiness that is the present shape of the world.”

“And now in the sabbatical year” (this was Judy Thatcher alone preaching now, for John Thatcher was dead before sabbatical year rolled around) “there is more room for hope than ever before. There are still the Twelve (we have the Word that we will not diminish below that); there are still the further seventy-two traveling and laboring and building somewhere; and there are still the scattered hundreds who will not let it die. Oh, there will be a great new blooming! It begins! It begins!”

“Where? Where does it begin?” Gregory and Trumpet used to ask this rowdy-minded mother of theirs with laughing irony. “Where does it begin at all?”

“With the two of you,” Judy would say. “With the dozens, with the

hundreds, with the thousands of others.”

Knock off the last zero, mother,” Trumpet would always laugh. “There are a few hundreds, perhaps, very widely scattered. But you know there are not thousands.”

“There have been thousands and millions,” Judy always insisted. “And there will be thousands and millions again.”

The Thatchers had been moving for all these years North and South in the marginal land that is a little to the West of the land of really adequate rain. There was plenty here for small bands. The Thatchers and their friends knew all the streams and pools and dry runs where one could dig to water. They had their own grain that seemed to follow their paths and seasons with its own rough sowing. They had their own cattle that were devoted to them in a strangely developed way.

Gregory Thatcher, as the summer starred night was rolling overhead (they were quite a ways North), was remembering the murder of his own father, John Thatcher, two years before. It had been a nervous night like this one, following a daytime visit of a man with not-quite-right eyes, a man with the slight tang of treason on him.

But the man had asked for a letter to take to one of the churches in dispersal. This was given; it could not be refused. And it was given under John Thatcher’s own name. The man had also asked for the sacrament; that could never be refused. And the man had been allowed to depart in peace and on foot as he had come. On foot-but a thousand yards away and he was on horse and gone in the afternoon’s dust to meet a scheming group.

The group had come just at next dawn, after such a nervous night as this one; had come from an unexpected direction and killed John Thatcher in one swoop. They then were all away except the several who were tossed and killed on the horns of the ordered bulls.

And the stunned reaction had found voice and words only in Judy’s puzzled lament:

“It is broken now. There are no longer the full twelve. It was never supposed to be broken.”

“Bend down, woman,” dead Thatcher said. “I am not quite dead. I lay my hands on you.” John Thatcher laid his hands on his wife Judy and made her one of the Twelve. Then he died (for the second time, Gregory believed. Gregory was sure his father had been killed by first assault, and

hai come alive for a moment to accomplish what he had forgotten).

“It is all right then,” Judy Thatcher had said. “We are still the Twelve. I make the twelfth. I was wrong ever to doubt of that; I was wrong ever to doubt of anything.”

So they had buried John Thatcher, the father and still a young man, and rejoiced that the Twelve still survived. That had been two years ago.

Gregory rode his circuit all night. It was his to do. It was not for his mother Judy or for his sister Trumpet. They had other roles. This was Gregory’s night. It had a name which he did not know. It was the Watch Night, the night of squires on the eve of their knighting, of princes on the nocturne of their crowning, of apostles on the vigil of their appointing.

There was a nervousness among the cattle here, and again there. There might be several strange bands in motion. The Thatchers had no firearms, no weapons at all that could not be excused or justified as being tools. A few of the roving gangs still had rifles, but these were sorry things near as dangerous to raldcr as to victim. All such things were thirty or more years old, and none had been well cared for. But the raiders always had bludgeons and knives.

Gregory fell asleep on horseback just before dawn. This was not a violation of the Watch Night for him. It was the one thing for which he never felt guilt. Actually he was cast into deep sleep; it was done to him; it was not of his own doing or failing at all. His horse also was cast into deep sleep, standing, with head bowed down and muzzle into the stiff grass. They both slept like wind-ruffled statues.

Then there was movement, double movement, intruded into that sleep. There was the stirring and arraying of the ordered bulls. There was the false attack; and the bulls went for the false attack, being faithful beasts only.

Then there was the death attack, coming apparently from the West. Gregory himself was struck from his horse. One of the raiders had counted coup on him, but not death coup. He was on the ground bcgrimed with his own blood and his horse was dead.

Then he heard the clear ringing voice from which his sister had her name. It rose to a happy battle cry and was cut off in quick death. The last note of the Trumpet was a gay one, though. This had been a big happy girl, as rowdy in mien and mind as her mother.

Trumpet Thatcher was dead on the ground: and the mother Judy

Thatcher was dead beyond all doubt. There was confusion all around, but there was no confusion about this fact.

The ordered horned bulls had wheeled now on the real attackers. They wrecked them. They tossed them, men and horses, into the air, and ripped and burst them before they came to ground. And the only words that Gregory could find were the same words that his mother Judy had found two years before.

“It is broken now. They are no longer the full Twelve. It was never supposed to be broken.”

His mother was quite dead and she would not come alive even for a moment to accomplish what she had forgotten. This dead Thatcher was not able to say, “Bend down, boy. I am not quite dead.” She was quite dead. She would speak no more, her broken mouth would be reconstituted no more, till resurrection morning.

“Are there no hands?” Gregory cried out, dry-eyed and wretched. “Are there no hands that might be laid upon me?”

“Aye, boy, mine are the hands,” came a voice. A man of mature years was walking through the arrayed bulls. And they, who had been killing strange men in the air and on the ground, opened their array and let this still stranger man come through. They bowed low down to the turf to this man.

“You are Levi,” Gregory said.

“I am Levi,” the man answered softly. He laid hands on Gregory. “Now you are one of the Twelve,” he said.

4

“There has been a long series of ‘Arrow Men’ or ‘Beshot Men’ who have been called (or who have called themselves) Sons of God. These Comet-like Men have all been exceptional in their brief periods. The Queer Fish, however, insist that their own particular Mentor ‘The Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds’ was unique and apart and beyond the other Arrow Men or Comet Men who have been called Sons of God. They state that he is more than Son of God: that He is God the Son.

“We do not acknowledge this uniqueness, but we do acknowledge the splendor and destroying brilliance of all these Arrow Men. To us, there is nothing wrong with the term Son of God. There is not even anything wrong with the term God, so long as it is understood to be meaningless, so long as we take him to be an unstructured God. Our own splendor

would have been less if there had not been sonic huge thing there which we unstructured. This unstructuring of God, which we have accomplished, was the greatest masterwork of man.

“The second greatest masterwork of man was the unstructuring of man himself, the ceasing to be man, the going into the hole and pulling the hole in after him; and the unstructuring, the destroying of the very hole then.

“We were, perhaps, the discredited cousins of man. We are not sure now what we were or are. We who were made of fire were asked to serve and salute those who were made of clay. We had been Arrow Men ourselves. Our flight was long flaming and downward, and now it has come to an end. We destroy ourselves also. We’ll be no more. It is the Being that we have always objected to.

“The collapsing of the human species was a puzzle for the anthropologists and the biologists, but both are gone now. They said though, before their going, that it is a common thing for a new species to collapse and disappear; that the collapse, in these common cases, is always sudden and complete; they said that it was an uncommon case for any species to endure. They said also that there was never anything unusual in the human species.

“They were almost wrong in this evaluation. There was, or there very nearly was, something unusual about the human species. It was necessary that we alter and tilt things a bit to remove that unusualness. We have done that. We’ve blown it all for them and for ourselves.

“Fly-blown brains and fly-flown flesh! What, have you not lusted for rotted mind and for rotted meat? Here are aphrodisiacs to aid you. Have you not lusted for unconsciousness and oblivion? You can have them both, so long as you accept them as rotted, which is the same as disordered, or unstructured, or uninstituted. This is the peaceful end of it all: the disordering, the disintegrating, the unstructuring, the rotting, the dry rot which is without issue, the nightmare which is the name of sleep without structure. Lust and lust again for this end! We offer you, while it is necessary, the means and the aids to it.”

Mind-Blowing and World-Blowing. Aphrodisiacs. — Argyros Daimon.

(No, really we don’t know why these Unstructured Scriveners chose such oddities for calamary names.)

Levi and Gregory were walking northward at a great easy ambic. “It is

no use to be bothered with horses and so be slowed,” Levi said. They moved without hurry but at unusual speed. It was a good trick. Gregory would not have been able to do it of himself, but with Levi he could do it. Levi had a magic way of delving in the earth, as for the two burials. He had this magic way of moving over the earth.

“You are Levi from over the sea,” Gregory said once as they moved along over the stiff grass pastures, “but how have you come? There are no longer any planes. There are no longer any ships. Nobody comes or goes. How have you done it?”

“Why Gregory, the world has not slumbered as deeply as you had believed. Things have not ceased completely to be done. Anything can be builded again, or builded a first time. And there are no limits to what a body can do when infused with spirit. Perhaps I walked on the water. Perhaps I traveled for three days in the belly of a whale and he brought me all this way and vomited me up on these high plains. Or perhaps I came by a different vehicle entirely. Oh, is it not a wonderful world that we walk this morning, Gregory!” They were in the dusty Dakota country, coming into that painted and barren region that is called the Bad Lands. Well, it was wonderful to the eye, perhaps, but it was dry and sterile.

“My father and my mother, both gone in blood now, have said that the world has gone to wrack and ruin,” Gregory was speaking with some difficulty, “and that there is nothing left but to trust in God.”

“Aye, and I say that we can build wonderful things out of that wrack and ruin, Gregory. Do you not know that all the pieces of the world are still here and that many of them are still useable? Know that the world has been not dead but sleeping. ‘Twas a foolish little nodding off, but we come awake again now. And this Trust is a reciprocal thing. We must trust in Cod, yes. And He must trust in us a little. We are the Twelve. He puzzles a bit now I think. ‘How are they going to get out of this one?’ He wonders. Yes boy, I jest, but so does the Lord sometimes. He jests, He jokes, and we be the point of His most pointed jokes. An old sage once said that there were only twelve jokes in the world. What if we be those twelve? The possible humor and richness of this idea will grow in you, Greg, when you meet the others of the Twelve. There are some sly jokes among the pack of us, I assure you of that.”

“When will we meet others?” Gregory asked.

“Oh, almost immediately now. It is a new day and a new year and a



new rebuilding We'll set about it almost at once, Greg."

"The regular people have hunted us down like the lowest animals," Gregory vented some of his old feelings. "They say that we are the plague carriers."

"It is life that you carry, Greg, and life is the plague to their wobble-eyed view. But they are no great thing, boy. They are only the Manichees returned to the world for a while, those people who were born old and tired. They are the ungenerating generation and their thing always passes."

"In my life it has shown no sign of passing."

"Your life has been a short one, boy Greg. But I shouldn't call you 'boy'; you are one of the Twelve now. Ah, those sterile parasites have always had a good press though, as the phrase used to be — the Manichees, the Albigenses, the Cathari, the Troubadors (they of the unstructured noise who couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, they in particular have had a good press), the Bogomils, parasites all, and parasites upon parasites. But the great rooted plant survives, and the parasites begin to die now."

"They have spirits also who work for them, Levi," Gregory said. "They have the Putty Dwarf, the Jester King, the Silvery Demon, others."

"Those are parasites also, Gregory. They are mean and noisome parasites on real Devildom, just as their counterparts are parasites on humanity. Listen now to the ordered birds, Gregory, and remember that each of us is worth many birds. It bothered the disordered brotherhoods more than anything that the birds still used structured music. It bothered them in Languedoc, and in Bosnia, and in the Persia of Shapur. It bothered them in Africa, and on these very plains, and it bothers them in hell. Let them be bothered then! They are the tares in the wheat, the anti-lifers."

Gregory Thatcher and Levi Cain had been going along at a great easy ramble, moving without hurry but at unusual speed. But a third man was with them now, and Gregory could not say how long he had been with them.

"You are Jim Alpha," Gregory said (he began to have the magic or insight that his mother had had, that his father had had before her), "and you also come from overseas from over a slightly different sea than that of Levi."

“I am Jim Alpha, yes, and I have crossed a slightly different sea. We gather now, Gregory. There will be the full set of us, and the secondary set, and also the hundreds. And besides ourselves there will be the Other Sheep. Do not be startled by their presence. They also are under the blessing.”

“There are bees in the air. Many thousands of bees,” Gregory was saying. “I have never seen so many.”

“They are bringing the wax,” Jim Alpha was saying, “and a little honey also. No, I don’t believe I’ve ever seen so many of them, not even in sabbatical year. Perhaps this is jubilee also. The bees are the most building and structuring of all creatures, and they have one primacy. They were the first creatures to adore; this was on the day before man was made. It won’t be forgotten of them.”

Other things and persons were gathering now, thousands of things, hundreds of persons. There was a remembered quality to many of them. “The remembered quality, the sense of something seen before, is only rightness recognized, Gregory,” Tom Culpa was saying in answer to Gregory’s thought. Tom Culpa must be rightness recognized then, since he was a remembered quality to Gregory Thatcher, he was someone appearing as seen and known before though the thing was impossible. How did Gregory even know his name without being told? Or the names of the others?

There was something coming on that would climax quickly. It was evening, but it was white evening: it would be white night, and then it would be morning. And the inner gathering seemed almost complete.

To Levi and Gregory and Jim Alpha had now gathered Matty Miracle (he was a fat old man; it was a miracle that he could be moving along with them so easily, matching their rapid amble), and Simon Canon, Melchisedech Rioga (what an all-hued man he was! — what was he, Gael, Galla, Galatian, Galilean?), Tom Culpa whose name meant Tom Twin, Philip Marcach, Joanie Cromova (Daughter of Thunder her name meant: Judy Thatcher hadn’t been the only woman among the Twelve), James Mollnir, Andy Johnson, and his younger brother Peter Johnson.

“It counts to twelve of us now,” Gregory Thatcher said very sagely, “and that means —”

“— that we have arrived to where we were going,” Peter Johnson laughed. This Peter Johnson was very young. “Most of the seventytwo are

here also," he continued. "Yes, now I see that they are all here. And many of the hundreds. We can never say whether all the hundreds are here."

"Peter," Gregory tried to phrase something a little less than a warning. "There are others here whom we know in a way but do not know by name, who are not of the Twelve nor of the Seventy-Two nor of the Hundreds."

"Oh, many of the Other Sheep are here," Peter Johnson said. "You remember that He said He had Other Sheep?"

"Yes," Gregory answered. He remembered it now. The puzzle was that this Peter Johnson was a boy no older than Gregory. There were many older men there, Levi, Jim Alpha, Matty Miracle, Simon Canon. How was it that Peter Johnson, that other twelve-year-old boy, was accepted as the Prince of them all?

The candle molders were busy. Candle molders? Yes, ten at least of them were working away there, or ten thousand. And full ten thousand bees brought wax to each of them. There would be very many candles burning through the white evening and the white night and on into the white dawn. Then these weren't ordinary candle molders or ordinary bees? No, no, they were the extraordinary of both; they had reality clinging to them in globs of light. Events gathered into constellations.

One using words wrongly or in their usual way might say that everything had taken on a dreamlike quality. No, but it had all lost its old nightmarish quality. It had all taken on, not a dreamlike quality, but the quality of reality.

There was, of course, the acre of fire, the field of fire. This acre was large enough to contain all that needed to be contained: it is always there, wherever reality is. There are tides that come and go; but even the lowest ebbing may not mean the end of the world. And then there are the times and tides of clarity, the jubilees, the sabbaticals. There is reassurance given. The world turns in its sleep, and parts of the world have moments of wakefulness.

Ten million bees had not brought all the wax for that acre of fire, and yet it was a very carefully structured fire in every tongue and flame of it. It was the benevolent illumination and fire of reality. It was all very clear, for being in the middle of a mystery. White night turned into white dawn; and the people all moved easily into the fire, their pomposities forgiven, their eyes open.

The Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds came again and

walked upon this world in that Moment. He often does so. The Moment is recurring but undivided.

No, we do not say that it was Final Morning. We are not out of it so easily as that. But the moment is all one. Pleasantly into the fire that is the reality then! It will sustain through all the lean times of flimsiness before and after.

## PARTHEN

Never had the springtime been so wonderful. Never had business been so good. Never was the World Outlook so bright. And never had the girls been so pretty.

It is true that it was the chilliest spring in decades — sharp, bitter, and eternally foggy — and that the sinuses of Roy Ronsard were in open revolt. It is admitted that bankruptcies were setting records, those of individuals and firms as well as those of nations. It is a fact that the aliens had landed (though their group was not identified) and had published their Declaration that one half of mankind was hereby obsoleted and the other half would be retained as servants. The omens and portents were black, but the spirits of men were the brightest and happiest ever.

To repeat, never had the girls been so pretty! There was no one who could take exception to that.

Roy Ronsard himself faced bankruptcy and the loss of everything that he had built up. But he faced it in a most happy frame of mind. A Higher Set of Values will do wonders toward erasing such mundane everyday irritations.

There is much to be said in favor of cold, vicious springtimes. They represent weather at its most vital. There is something to be said for exploding sinuses. They indicate, at least, that a man has something in his head. And, if a man is going to be a bankrupt, then let him be a happy bankrupt.

When the girls are as pretty as all that, the rest does not matter.

Let us make you understand just how pretty Eva was! She was a golden girl with hair like honey. Her eyes were blue - or they were green - or they were violet or gold and they held a twinkle that melted a man. The legs of the creature were like Greek poetry and the motion of her hips was something that went out of the world with the old sail ships. Her breastwork had a Gothic upsweep - her neck was passion incarnate and her shoulders were of a glory past describing. In her whole person she was a study of celestial curvatures.

Should you never have heard her voice, the meaning of music has been denied you. Have you not enjoyed her laughter? Then your life remains unrealized.

It is possible that exaggeration has crept into this account? No. That is

not possible. All this fits in with the cold appraisal of men like Sam Pinta, Cyril Colbert, Willy Whitecastle, George Goshen, Roy Ronsard himself - and that of a hundred men who had gazed on her in amazement and delight since she came to town. All these men are of sound judgment in this field. And actually she was prettier than they admitted.

Too, Eva Ellery was but one of many. There was Jeannie who brought a sort of pleasant insanity to all who met her. Roberta who was a scarlet dream. Helen - high-voltage sunshine. Margaret - the divine clown. And it was high adventure just to meet Hildegarde. A man could go blind from looking at her.

"I can't understand how there can be so many beautiful young women in town this year," said Roy. "It makes the whole world worthwhile. Can you let me have fifty dollars, Willy? I'm going to see Eva Ellery. When I first met her I thought that she was a hallucination. She's real enough, though. Do you know her?"

"Yes. A most remarkable young woman. She has a small daughter named Angela who really stops the clock. Roy, I have just twenty dollars left in the world and I'll split it with you. As you know, I'm going under, too. I don't know what I'll do after they take my business away from me. It's great to be alive, Roy."

"Wonderful. I hate not having money to spend on Eva, but she's never demanding in that. In fact she's lent me money to smooth out things pertinent to the termination of my business. She's one of the most astute businesswomen I ever knew and has been able to persuade my creditors to go a little easy on me. I won't get out with my shirt. But, as she says, I may get out with my skin."

There was a beautiful, cold, mean fog, and one remembered that there was a glorious sun (not seen for many days now) somewhere behind it. The world rang with cracked melody and everybody was in love with life.

Everybody except Peggy Ronsard and wives like her who did not understand the higher things. Peggy had now become like a fog with no sun anywhere behind it. Roy realized, as he came home to her for a moment, that she was very drab.

"Well?" Peggy asked with undertones in her voice. Her voice did not have overtones like that of Eva. Only undertones.

"Well what? My - uh - love?" Roy asked.

“The business - what’s the latest on it today? What have you come up with?”

“Oh, the business. I didn’t bother to go by today. I guess it’s lost.”

“You are going to lose it without a fight? You used not to be like that. Two weeks ago your auditing firm said that you had all sorts of unrealized assets and that you’d come out of this easily.”

“And two weeks later my auditing firm is also taking bankruptcy. Everybody’s doing it now.”

“There wasn’t anything wrong with that auditing firm till that Roberta woman joined it. And there wasn’t anything wrong with your company till you started to listen to that Eva creature.”

“Is she not beautiful, Peggy?”

Peggy made a noise Roy understood as assent, but he had not been understanding his wife well lately.

“And there’s another thing,” said Peggy dangerously. “You used to have a lot of the old goat in you and that’s gone. A wife misses things like that. And your wolfish friends have all changed. Sam Pinta used to climb all over me like I was a trellis -and I couldn’t sit down without Willy Whitecastle being on my lap. And Judy Pinta says that Sam has changed so much at home that life just isn’t worth living anymore. You all used to be such loving man. What’s happened to you?”

“Ah - I believe that our minds are now on a higher plane.”

“You didn’t go for that higher plane jazz till that Eva woman came along. And that double-damned Roberta! But she does have two lovely little girls, I’ll admit. And that Margaret, she’s the one that’s got Cyril Colbert and George Goshen where they’re pushovers for anything now. She does have a beautiful daughter, though.”

“Have you noticed bow many really beautiful women there are in town lately, Peggy?”

“Roy, I hope those aliens get every damned cucumber out of that patch! The monsters are bound to grab all the pretty women first. I hope they’re a bunch of sadist alligators and do everything that the law disallows to those doll babies.”

“Peggy, I believe that the aliens (and we are told that they are already among us) will be a little more sophisticated than popular ideas anticipate.”

“I hope they’re a bunch of Jack the Rippers. I believe I could go for

Jack today. He'd certainly be a healthy contrast to what presently obtains."

Peggy had put her tongue on the crux. For the beautiful young women, who seemed to be abundant in town that springtime, had an odd effect on the men who came under their influence. The goats among the men had become lambs and the wolves had turned into puppies.

Jeannie was of such a striking appearance as to make a man almost cry out. But the turmoil that she raised in her gentlemen friends was of a cold sort, for all that the white flames seemed to leap up. She was Artemis herself and the men worshipped her on the higher plane. She was wonderful to look at and to talk to. But who would be so boorish as to touch?

The effect of Eva was similar - and of Roberta and of Helen who had three little daughters as like her as three golden apples) and of Margaret and of Hildegarde. How could a man not ascend to the higher plane when such wonderful and awesome creatures as these abounded?

But the damage was done when the men carried this higher plane business home to their comparatively colorless wives. The men were no longer the ever-loving husbands that they should have been. The most intimate relations ceased to take place. If continued long this could have an effect on the statistics.

But daily affairs sometimes crept into the conversations of even those men who had ascended to the higher plane.

"I was wondering," Roy asked George Goshen, "when our businesses are all gone - who do they go to?"

"Many of us have wondered that," George told him. "They all seem to devolve upon anonymous recipients or upon corporations without apparent personnel. But somebody is gathering in the companies. One theory is that the aliens are doing it."

"The aliens are among us, the authorities say, but nobody has seen them. They publish their program and their progress through intermediaries who honestly do not know the original effecters. The aliens still say that they will make obsolete one half of mankind and make servants of the other half."

"Jeannie says - did you ever see her pretty little daughters? - that we see the aliens every day and do not recognize them for what they are. She says that likely the invasion of the aliens will have obtained its objective



before we realize what that is. What's the news from the rest of the country and the world?"

"The same. All business is going to pot and everybody is happy. On paper, things were never more healthy. There's a lot of new backing from somewhere and all the businesses thrive as soon as they have shuffled off their old owners. The new owners - and nobody can find out who or what they are - must be happy with the way things are going. Still, I do not believe that anybody could be happier or more contented than I am. Can you let me have fifty cents, George? I just remembered that I haven't eaten today. Peggy has gone to work for what used to be my company, but she's a little slow to give me proper spending money. Come to think of it, Peggy has been acting peculiar lately."

"I have only forty cents left in the world, Roy. Take the quarter. My wife has gone to work also, but I guess there will never be any work for us. Did you think we'd ever live to see the NO MALES WANTED signs on every hiring establishment in the country? Oh, well - if you're happy nothing else matters."

"George, there's a humorous note that creeps into much of the world news lately. It seems that ours is not the only city with an unusual number of pretty young ladies this season. They've been reported in Teheran and Lvov, in Madras and Lima and Boston. Everywhere."

"No! Pretty girls in Boston? You're kidding. This has certainly been an upside-down year when things like that can happen. But did you ever see a more beautiful summertime, Roy?"

"On my life I never did."

The summer had been murky and the sun had not been seen for many months. But it was a beautiful murk. And when one is attuned to inner beauty the outer aspect of things does not matter. The main thing was that everyone was happy.

Oh, there were small misunderstandings. There was a wife - this was reported as happening in Cincinnati, but it may have happened in other places also - who one evening reached out and touched her husband's hand in a form of outmoded affection. Naturally the man withdrew his hand rudely, for it was clear that the wife had not yet ascended to his higher plane. In the morning he went away and did not return.

Many men were drifting away from their homes in those days. Most men, actually. However that old cohabitational arrangement had grown

into being, it no longer had anything to recommend it. When one has consorted with the light itself, what can he find in a tallow candle?

Most of the men became destitute wanderers and loafers. They were happy with their inner illumination. Every morning the dead ones would be shoveled up by the women on the disposal trucks and carted away. And every one of those men died happy. That's what made it so nice. To anyone who had entered higher understanding death was only an interlude.

It was a beautiful autumn day. Roy Ronsard and Sam Pinta had just completed their fruitless rounds of what used to be called garbage cans but now had more elegant names. They were still hungry, but happily so for it was truly a beautiful autumn.

The snow had come early, it is true, and great numbers of men had perished from it. But if one had a happy life, it was not a requisite for it to be a long life. Men lived little in the world now, dwelling mostly in thought. But sometimes they still talked to each other.

"It says here" - Roy Ronsard began to read a piece of old newspaper that had been used for wrapping bones - "that Professor Eimer, just before he died of malnutrition, gave as his opinion that the aliens among us cannot stand sunlight. He believed it was for this reason that they altered our atmosphere and made ours a gloomy world. Do you believe that, Sam?"

"Hardly. How could anybody call ours a gloomy world? I believe that we are well rid of that damned sun."

"And it says that he believed that one of the weapons of the aliens was their intruding into men a general feeling of euphor -the rest of the paper is torn off."

"Roy, I saw Margaret today. From a distance, of course. Naturally I could not approach such an incandescent creature in my present condition of poverty. But, Roy, do you realize how much we owe to those pretty girls? I really believe that we would have known nothing of the higher plane or the inner light if it had not been for them. How could they have been so pretty?"

"Sam, there is one thing about them that always puzzled me."

"Everything about them puzzled me. What do you mean?"

"All of them have daughters, Sam. And none of them have husbands. Why did none of them have husbands? Or sons?"

“Never thought of it. It’s been a glorious year, Roy. My only regret is that I will not live to see the winter that will surely be the climax to this radiant autumn. We have had so much - we cannot expect to have everything. Do you not just love deep snow over you?”

“It’s like the blanket of heaven, Sam. When the last of us is gone - and it won’t be too long now - do you think the girls will remember how much light they brought into our lives?”

## SEVEN STORY DREAM

Gadberry had a contempt for dawns badly done. He knew how blatant and stylized the outdoor world can be in its pristine moments: the contrived shagginess of grass, the stupidity of trees, the falsity of flowers, the oafishness of the birds and their inept melody. These scratched the smooth surface of his soul. “Bad work, very bad work,” Cadbeny would opine, for he was an artist.

Yet there were times when these sorry units arranged themselves with striking effect. On this very early dawn they made an almost perfect harmony, and Gadberry gracefully acknowledged it. There it was: the old oaks, and the new firs and hedges; the ragged Bermuda on the vacant lot in the new sun, the thin rye grass that held to the shade of the building, the corpse on the lawn, the row of hollyhocks and the lone aster in the middle of them, the drooping mimosa full of driveling birds, the even rank of garbage cans standing chalky in the aluminum dawn, and that damned dew over everything.

In spite of the elements that went into the composition the effect was near perfect — and yet there was one clashing entity in that aubade scene. Gadberry reviewed it in his mind, for the artist is satisfied with nothing but perfection.

The firs, the hedges, the corpse, the mimosa, the garbage cans, the lawn, the hollyhocks with their lone aster — something was in that peaceful morning scene that simply did not belong there.

Gadberry strode over and savagely struck down the aster with its white flower. The harmony of the scene was now perfect. He walked away, his artist’s soul satisfied.

On his way to find an early eating place, he met a policeman named Embree and told him that Minnie Jo Merry was lying dead on that little lawn behind the apartment where she lived, and perhaps it should be looked into.

Captains Keil and Gold were there quickly and in charge. Minnie Jo was bruised about the throat and dried blood framed her mouth, but her death may have been caused by a violent concussion. Keil and Gold left her to Dr. Sanderson and their men. There was no crowd. This was very early on a Saturday morning, the apartment was on a quiet street, and the small rear lawn was secluded.

Orders were given for all the residents of the apartment building to remain in the building, and Captain Keil sent for Gillord Gadberry, the only one who had left. Gadberry told the patrolman who came for him that he would come as soon as he had finished his breakfast, and not a moment before. He finished it leisurely, drinking coffee and sketching while the policeman fumed. He was sketching a fuming policeman.

“Mrs. Raffel,” Captain Keil said, “you are the owner and operator of this apartment. I assume that you know something of your renters. Who lives here?”

“Minnie Jo lived here, and how will I get her rent now? She used to say, ‘You worry too much about my rent. I’m not much further back than some of the others. You should know that I’m good for it. As long as I live I will always be good for what I owe.’ But now who will be good for what she owes?”

“Your problem, Mrs. Raffel. Who else lived — lives here?”

“Dillahunty, Gadberry, Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Nazworthy, all in a permanent or temporary state of singleness.”

“Six living and one dead tenant. Is that all?”

“It’s a small place, but I do have two other empty units-three it will be now. I doubt if this will help me rent them.”

“It may not make a difference. The girl was murdered in her own room, we believe, and she seems to have made no outcry. She was either taken very suddenly, or she knew the intruder well.”

“Not necessarily, Captain. Minnie Jo was a very open person. If Jack the Ripper himself had come in, red from his trade, she’d have said, ‘Hi, honey, sit down and talk to me.’ But it was probably someone she knew.”

“What are your feelings on hearing of the death of Miss Merry?”

“Satisfaction — though I’ll miss her — and relief and thankfulness that it has finally turned out all right.”

“Turned out all right? Do you call it turning out all right that she was murdered?” he asked her.

“Oh yes. There were many worse things that could have happened to her. How lucky that Minnie Jo was killed before they happened!”

“You will have to explain that. Did you hate her?”

“No, I loved her — and I will explain. Minnie Jo was quite a good girl, but she was on the edge of becoming quite a bad girl. I have seen it happen to so many of the young ones who are loose in the world. Every

time I know one, and notice her nearing the change, I pray that something will intervene and prevent it. This is the first time my prayers have been answered, and I'm thankful."

"Could you yourself have done anything to bring about this, ah, intervention, this preventative death?"

"I have just told you: I prayed. I didn't know it would be death, but that's as good a solution as any."

Then they questioned her a little about other things.

Gadberry, now back from his breakfast, was questioned by Captain Gold.

"Gadberry, do you often get up so early?"

"Never. But I often stay up this late. I work at night and sleep in the daytime."

"Why?" Captain Gold inquired.

"It was originally a pose. Then I became used to it."

"You seemed extraordinarily cool on discovering Miss Merry dead. You did not make an outcry, or hurry to report it."

"I reported it to the first person I met, a policeman. This seemed the logical person, and the logical thing to do."

"Almost too logical. What was your opinion of Miss Merry?"

"Alive, or dead? The girl was somehow completed in death. It improves many people. So often we see only the outside of people, but to look at her smeared with her own blood gives an added dimension, a more total view."

"Ah, what was your opinion of her alive?"

"Her hands and ankles were rather good; between, she was conventional. She hadn't eyes, no eyes at all. It isn't usual for a girl her age to have eyes. A child will sometimes have eyes, a woman after thirty may have them again, or a man after forty. I never saw her hair, which is to say that it was doctored. I sketched her ears sometimes, and her throat. I was not satisfied with either of them, but then it isn't twice a year that I come on either that is really good. Are you interested in these things?"

"We are somewhat interested in the throat of this girl, and other matters. Since you work at night, you must have been awake. Did you hear any outcry or evidence of a struggle?"

"No. I could be throttled myself and not notice it. When I work I am taken by the Holy Spirit of art. I am probably unable to help you on the

more mundane details you are seeking.”

“What is your opinion of the tenant George Handle? It is reported that you sponge on him considerably.”

“The artist is worthy of his hire. George is an oaf, a fool; but do not believe that a fool and his money are easily parted. I have to work for every dollar I twist out of him. George has caught the sickness of self-improvement. He learns at night. He has one of those sets with an earphone for under the pillow. He’s put quite a bit of money into the recordings, money much better given to me. He has his own recorder, reads into it things he wishes to learn, then has them played back while he sleeps. Whatever he learns while asleep, he is still a fool when awake.”

“You haven’t any use for fools?”

“But I have! I often make use of fools.”

They questioned him a little more, then went on to Izzard.

“Mr. Izzard, what were your relations with Miss Merry?” Keil asked.

“Avuncular — of the Dutch-uncle sort. Low Dutch, really, but she hadn’t come to realize that yet. I lavished gifts on her, and she was friendly. I believe I would ultimately have been successful. There was a change beginning in her,”

“Yes. Others have noticed the change. Were these expensive gifts?”

“Not to me. The price tags don’t matter. I run the A to Izzard Variety Store. She was without discernment, and I have access to bargains.”

“You wouldn’t have been rebuffed by her, and been angry enough to do her in?”

“I was rebuffed by her constantly, but she did it in a graceful way — never so as to stop the flow of gifts. My timetable for her was a long one and I am sorry to see it interrupted. No, I never laid a hand on her, except sometimes in attempted affection.”

They questioned him a little about the others, a little more about himself, and left him.

Next, they questioned Nazworthy, a large, sullen-appearing man. He said that any of them might have done it: Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Gadberry, Dillahunty. “They are a bad bunch. All of them always looking at the young girl. Any of them do it. Yes, I am awake when it happen. I hear the shots ring out. I say, ‘Oh somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.’ Whichever one you decide on, I will positively identity him as the killer.”

“You are sure that you heard shots? She was not shot.”

“It was the knife I hear, then. I hear it go in loud. I say, ‘Somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.’”

“She was not knifed.”

“How was it, then? What is the loud noise I heard? How did he kill her?”

“We believe that she was strangled, and then thrown or pushed from her window.”

“My very thought. That is what I heard. The strangle noises and the thrown-out-of-the-window noises. I hear everything. I know everything. I will give testimony.”

There was the look of arrogant laughter behind the hard eyes of Nazworthy. He was talking nonsense, either seriously or speciously. They would get nothing out of him.

Mr. Dillahunty told Keil and Gold, “My opinion of the lodgers I cannot give as I would like, being opposed to profanity. You may have to discount my opinion of them, however. I always have a low opinion of those with whom I live; but when I have moved on to other lodgings I remember them with affection. No, I heard nothing in the night. I hear little without my aid, and I do not sleep with it. My acquaintance with the aforesaid Minnie Jo was sketchy. She would smile, and I would smile, but I am thrice her age and a crippled man. Having second sight, I knew that this would happen... No, I haven't second sight to that extent; I don't know who did it. You are sure it was one of the lodgers?”

“No. But she was apparently in her own room and in bed when accosted. She seems to have been strangled there and thrown out her own window. It was quite late, after the dew, and no feet left the building after the dew and before her discovery — except those of Gadberry, who reported her. At the moment we have no leads to anyone except those who lived in this building. Tell us, what about Mrs. Raffel?”

“A religious fanatic but a good woman. It is believed by the others that I pay the regular rates here, but that is not so. I live here partly on the charity of Mrs. Raffel.”

“And Gadberry, the artist?”

“In one word, selfish.”

“George Handle? He has been called a fool.”

“Only a half-fool. But easily led.”



“Izzard?”

“A merchant. He never spent a penny without a return.”

“Nazworthy? Is he as crazy as he sounds?”

“No, he isn’t. He’s a sardonic kidder, with a dislike for all authority. I can imagine a little the line he would take with the police. The cat, the only other animal that indulges in straight-faced sardonic humor, betrays itself by a flick of the tail. Nazworthy has the same motion, but without the tail.”

“Could he kill?”

“I doubt he could kill Minnie Jo Merry. He hates only pretentious people, and she wasn’t. He could kill a policeman — or her killer. If another is killed, then you will know.”

“We’ll watch for that. Lamprey?”

“Nothing there. A nothing man. Did you notice the girl well? A beautiful thing and finely made, but there was plenty of strength to her. That nothing man couldn’t have strangled her. She’d have strangled him and thrown him out the window. You’ll have to look to one of the others, not to him.”

Dillahunty was right. Lamprey was a nothing man, and he was terrified of the police. “I didn’t kill her. I didn’t know her. I didn’t know anybody. I wash dishes at Webbers. I don’t know nobody. I’m in my room all night.”

“Well did you hear noises in the night?”

“Noises I always hear, and some of them never happen. I’m a nervous man, but I kill nobody, I hurt nobody. It is more I am always afraid someone would kill me.”

Lamprey was a small man with small hands, a frightened man on the edge of incompetency. They questioned him a little more and left him.

“What do we have?” Captain Keil asked. “A heavy old woman who is a religious fanatic and also a good woman, and is glad that the girl was killed before something had happened to her. An artist who is selfish. A sardonic kidder who is not as stupid as he acts. A half-fool who is easily led. A nothing man. A merchant who does not spend without a return. An old Irishman who is thrice her age, but can we be sure that all the sap is dead in him? Seven, and one of them is crazy, but which? Let’s go talk to the half-fool.”

“Handle,” Captain Gold said, “did you sleep well last night?”

“No. I have never slept well any night of my life. I dream a lot and worry a lot. I’m totally alive when I sleep.”

“Was it because of your restlessness at night that you decided to try the learn-while-you-sleep systems?”

“Yes. I want to know things, so I decided to tap my nocturnal energy, as the advertisement said.”

“What is your relationship with Gilford Gadberry?”

“Oh, he takes me for quite a bit, but he knows all the things I want to know. He can talk about music and funny paintings and the new dirty novels and psychology and things like that. Sometimes I turn him on when he talks, and play him back at night. Sometimes when I lend him money he’ll make recordings for me — Gaelic furniture design, and things like that. He arranges the things I’ll hear at night so I’ll get a well-rounded liberal education.”

“I see. Did you hear any noises last night?”

“I hear noises every night, though I sleep with the earphones on, and all outside noise is supposed to be cut out. It must be that I dream the noises.

“Did you dream last night? Did you dream anything about a murder or a dead person?” Gold asked.

“Yes. About seven dreams like that.”

“Tell us one of them.”

“Which one?”

“Hell, I don’t know. We’re shooting blind. Tell us one.”

“Well, this one, it’s kind of silly. This was a long time ago, or anyhow it took place in a cabin and by candlelight. We sat wake over a corpse. We cracked and ate walnuts, but someone objected when we threw the shells in with the corpse, though that was a good place to throw them. Then someone else.”

“Oh Judas!” said Captain Keil.

“I believe that is enough of that one,” Captain Gold said. “Were all of the seven dreams like that?”

“All of them about murder or corpses, yes. All of them kind of silly.”

“Seven story dreams we have yet,” Keil said. “We’re getting nowhere.”

“Then we’ll get somewhere,” Gold said. “Handle, have you any idea who killed Minnie Jo Merry?”

“I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry.”

“What?”

“I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie —”

“You are talking for the record?”

“Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed —”

So they took him downtown, but first they gave orders for a new lock to be put on George Handle’s door and they left a guard at the apartment building.

Naturally they didn’t leave it at that. The confession of the half-fool was complete enough. There were odd elements in it, but he was an odd man. He said that he had killed the girl in a dream; that he had risen and gone to her room and strangled her and thrown her out of the open window because he was jealous. Then he had gone back to his bed, to other dreams.

Yet there were points about that murder that hadn’t been given out, that only the killer could have known; George Handle knew them

Nevertheless, the two captains continued to check during that morning. They found that Minnie Jo was an inefficient but promising worker for a stationery company. Her particular girlfriend believed that Minnie Jo ran around only with the men where she lived. They checked the places she frequented, and she had been seen with all the men.

She had been out with Gadberry and with Handle often, and with Izzard nearly as often. She had even been seen dining with the sardonic Nazworthy at a sardonic place run by two Bulgarian brothers. She often went to Webbers, and sometimes drank coffee in the kitchen with the dishwasher Lamprey. It was believed by them at Webbers, though, that this was mere kindness on her part.

Minnie Jo had even been seen drinking Irish coffee with Dillahunty in the after-midnight hours at Maddigan’s. Nor was she the only girl a third his age that he brought in. The sap was not all dead in him yet.

They found that Dillahunty was well liked, Handle was liked, and even poor Lamprey was liked.

Izzard was not liked, Gadberry was not liked, Nazworthy was not liked.

“We can tell nothing by that,” Keil said. “Handle has confessed, and it makes no difference that the people who know him like him. There is nothing to tie onto the others, even if Gadberry is selfish, Izzard is

demanding, and Nazworthy is sardonic. We still have the fact that Handle has confessed.”

“Yes. Repetitiously. But to be sure, let’s go hear him again. Again, George Handle told them, “I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie —”

“He sounds like —”

“Yes, doesn’t he?” Keil interrupted Gold. “Let’s go look for it.”

“Has anybody been trying to get into Handle’s room?” they asked the guard at the apartment.

“Gadberry has. Says Handle owes him money. Says he was to go in and get it. Says he wears Handle’s shirts, and this locking out puts him to grave inconvenience. Handle never locked his door, according to him. Gadberry was disappointed to find the new lock on it. He seems pretty nervous now.” They found Gadberry.

“Come on with us. We’ll go to his room and get it.”

“What? Get what?”

“What you were trying to get. What is making you nervous that you couldn’t get? It will be here, somewhere with the bunch of them. Quite a few of them here, aren’t there, Gadberry?”

They were in Handle’s room now.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Gadberry protested.

“The tapes, the wires, the records. How long would it take to play them all?”

“I don’t know.”

“You know pretty well. It would take about forty hours or more, wouldn’t it? Will you find it for us, or must we play them all? And you will listen.”

“I won’t listen to forty hours of that drivel. I’ll find it for you. I’d have said that nothing could break me down, but that surely could.”

“Why did you kill the girl, Gadberry?”

“Jealousy, frustration, curiosity...”

“I can understand the jealousy. She was an attractive girl. What was the frustration?”

“She was almost perfect, but not quite, and it is that which is just short of a masterpiece that infuriates. It is so near — yet it misses. I’m always in anger to destroy a near-masterpiece.”

“So you destroyed her. And the third element was your curiosity, like

when you said ‘The girl was somehow completed in death.’ You had to see how she would look dead.”

“Yes. That knowledge was necessary to my work.” Gadberry had located the tape for them, and Captain Keil was threading it into the machine.

“I suspect that you weren’t accurate in your appraisal to us of Miss Merry, Gadberry. You said that she hadn’t eyes, and other things.”

“I lied. She had eyes, and she wasn’t conventional. She was near perfect; gentlemen. So near.”

“And in preparation for the murder it was only necessary for you to condition the easily led George Handle to a confession?”

“Astute of me, was it not, Captains?”

The machine played now in the compelling voice of Gilford Gadberry, as it had night after night played to George Handle, in his sleep, till he had learned to answer on cue; and the cue, of course, was the question: “Who killed Minnie Jo Merry?”

“Pretty uninspired,” Gadberry had to admit, “but I had to assume uninspired questioners, to whom the cliché would come naturally.”

The machine went on to recount certain abominations that only the killer knew he would commit, but the voice of that most polished adman returned again and again to the command:

“Say, ‘I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed —’”

# THE WORLD AS WILL AND WALLPAPER

## 1

*A template, a stencil, a plan.  
Corniest, orniest damsel and man,  
Orderly, emptily passion and pity,  
All-the-World, All-the-World, All-the-World  
City.*

*—13th Street Ballad*

There is an old dictionary-encyclopedia that defines a City as “...a concentration of persons that is not economically self-contained.” The dictionary-encyclopedia being an old one, however (and there is no other kind), is mistaken. The World City is economically self-contained.

It was William Morris who read this definition in the old book. William was a bookie, or readie, and he had read parts of several books. But now he had a thought: If all the books are old, then things may no longer be as the books indicate. I will go out and see what things are like today in the City. I will traverse as much of the City as my life allows me. I may even come to the Wood Beyond the World that my name-game ancestor described.

William went to the Permit Office of the City. Since there was only one City, there might be only one Permit Office, though it was not large.

“I want a permit to traverse as much of the City as my life allows me,” William told the permit man. “I even want a permit to go to the Wood Beyond the World. Is that possible?”

The permit man did a little skittish dance around William, “like a one-eyed gander around a rattlesnake.” The metaphor was an old and honored one, one of the fifty-four common metaphors. They both understood it: it didn’t have to be voiced. William was the first customer the permit man had had in many days, though, so the visit startled him.

“Since everything is permitted, you will need no permit,” the permit man said. “Go, man, go.”

“Why are you here then?” William asked him. “If there are no permits, why is there a Permit Office?”

“This is my niche and my notch,” the permit man said. “Do away with

me and my office and you begin to do away with the City itself. It is the custom to take a companion when you traverse the City.”

Outside, William found a companion named Kandy Kalosh and they began to traverse the City that was the World. They began (it was no more than coincidence) at a marker set in stone that bore the words “Beginning of Stencil 35,352.” The City tipped and tilted a bit, and they were on their way. Now this is what the City was like: It was named Will of the World City, for it had been constructed by a great and world-wide surge of creative will. Afterward, something had happened to that surge, but it did not matter; the City was already created then.

The City was varied, it was joyful, it was free and it covered the entire world. The mountains and heights had all been removed, and the City, with its various strips of earth and sweet water and salt water, floated on the ocean on its interlocking floaters. As to money values, everything was free; and everything was free as to personal movement and personal choice. It was not really crowded except in the places where the people wanted it crowded, for people do love to congregate. It was sufficient as to foodstuff and shelter and entertainment. These things have always been free, really; it was their packaging and traffic that cost, and now the packaging and traffic were virtually eliminated.

“Work is joy” flashed the subliminal signs. Of course it is. It is a joy to stop and turn into an area and work for an hour, even an hour and a half, at some occupation never or seldom attempted before. William and Kandy entered an area where persons made cloth out of clamshells, softening them in one solution, then drawing them out to filaments on a machine, then forming (not weaving) them into cloth on still another machine. The cloth was not needed for clothing or for curtains, though sometimes it was used for one or the other. It was for ornamentation. Temperature did not require cloth (the temperature was everywhere equitable) and modesty did not require it, but there was something that still required a little cloth as ornament.

William and Kandy worked for nearly an hour with other happy people on the project. It is true that their own production was all stamped “Rejected” when they were finished, but that did not mean that it went all the way back to the clamshells, only back to the filament stage.

“Honest labor is never lost,” William said as solemnly as a one-horned owl with the pip.

“I knew you were a readie, but I didn’t know you were a talkie,” Kandy said. People didn’t talk much then. Happy people have no need to talk. And of course honest labor is never lost, and small bits of it are pleasurable.

This portion of the City (perhaps all portions of the City) floated on an old ocean itself. It had, therefore, a slight heave to it all the time. “The City is a tidy place” was an old and honored saying. It referred to the fact that the City moved a little with the tides. It was a sort of joke.

The two young persons came ten blocks; they came a dozen. For much of this traverse the City had been familiar to William but not to Kandy. They had been going west, and William had always been a westing lad. Kandy, however, had always wandered east from her homes, and she was the farthest west that she had ever been when she met William.

They came to the 14th Street Water Ballet and watched the swimmers. These swimmers were very good, and great numbers of curiously shaped fish frolicked with them in the green salt-fresh pools. Anyone who wished to could, of course, swim in the Water Ballet, but most of the swimmers seemed to be regulars. They were part of the landscape, of the waterscape.

William and Kandy stopped to eat at an algae-and-plankton quick-lunch place on ~5th Street. Indeed, Kandy worked there for half an hour, pressing the plankton and adding squirts of special protein as the people ordered it. Kandy had worked in quick-lunch places before.

The two of them stopped at the Will of the World Exhibit Hall on ~6th Street. They wrote their names with a stylus in wax when they went in, or rather William wrote the names of both of them for Kandy could not write. And because he bore the mystic name of William, he received a card Out of the slot with a genuine Will of the World verse on it:

This City of the World is wills  
Of Willful folk, and nothing daunts it.  
With daring hearts we hewed the hills  
To make the World as Willy wants it.

Really, had it taken such great will and heart to build the City of the World? It must have or there would not have been a Will of the World Exhibit Hall to commend it. There were some folks, however, who said



that the building of the World City had been an automatic response.

Kandy, being illiterate (as the slot knew), received a picture card.

They stopped at the Cliff-Dweller Complex on ~7th Street. This part of the City was new to William as well as to Kandy.

The cliffs and caves were fabricated and not natural cliff dwellings, but they looked very much as old cliff dwellings must have looked. There were little ladders going up from one level to the next. There were people sitting on the little terraces with the small-windowed apartments behind them. Due to the circular arrangement of the cliff dwellings, very many of the people were always visible to one another. The central courtyard was like an amphitheater. Young people played stickball and Indian ball in this area. They made music on drums and whistles. There were artificial rattlesnakes in coils, artificial rib-skinny dogs, artificial coyotes, artificial women in the act of grinding corn with hand querns. And also, in little shelters or pavilions, there were real people grinding simulacrum corn on apparatus.

Kandy Kalosh went into one of the pavilions and ground corn for fifteen minutes. She had a healthy love for work. William Morris made corn-dogs out of simulacrum corn and seaweeds. It was pleasant there. Sometimes the people sang simulacrum Indian songs. There were patterned blankets, brightly collared, and woven out of bindweed. There were buffoons in masks and buffoon suits who enacted in-jokes and in-situations that were understood by the cliff-dwelling people only, but they could be enjoyed by everyone.

“All different, all different, every block different,” William murmured in rapture. It had come on evening, but evening is a vague thing. It was never very bright in the daytime or very dark at night. The World City hadn’t a clear sky but it had always a sort of diffused light. William and Kandy traveled still farther west.

“It is wonderful to be a world traveler and to go on forever, William exulted. “The City is so huge that we cannot see it all in our whole lives and every bit of it is different.”

“A talkie you are,” Kandy said. “However did I get a talkie? If I were a talkie too I could tell you something about that every-part-of-it-is-different bit.”

“This is the greatest thing about the whole World City,” William sang, “to travel the City itself for all our lives, and the climax of it will be to

seethe Wood Beyond the World. But what happens then, Kandy? The City goes on forever, covering the whole sphere. It cannot be bounded. What is beyond the Wood Beyond the World?"

"If I were a talkie I could tell you," Kandy said.

But the urge to talk was on William Morris. He saw an older and somehow more erect man who wore an arm band with the lettering "Monitor" or it. Of course only a readie, or bookie, like William would have been able to read the word.

"My name-game ancestor had to do with the naming as well as the designing of the Wood Beyond the World," William told the erect and smiling man, "for I also am a William Morris. I am avid to see this ultimate wood. It is as though I have lived for the moment."

"If you will it strongly enough, then you may see it, Willy," the man said.

"But I am puzzled," William worried out the words, and his brow was furrowed. "What is beyond the Wood Beyond the World?"

"A riddle, but an easy one." The man smiled. "How is it that you are a readie and do not know such simple things?"

"Cannot you give me a clue to the easy riddle?" William begged.

"Yes," the man said. "Your name-game ancestor had to do with the designing of one other particular thing besides the Wood Beyond the World."

"Come along, readie, come along," Kandy said.

They went to the West Side Show Square on 18th Street. Neither of them had ever been to such a place, but they had heard rumors of it for there is nothing at all like the West Side Show Square on 18th Street.

There were the great amplifiers with plug-ins everywhere. Not only were the instruments plugged in, but most of the people were themselves plugged in. And ah! The wonderful setting was like the backside of old tenements all together in a rough circuit. There were period fire escapes that may even have been accurate. They looked as though persons might actually climb up and down on them. Indeed, light persons had actually done this in the past, but it was forbidden now as some of the folks had fallen to death or maiming. But the atmosphere was valid.

Listen, there was period washing on period clotheslines! It was flapped by little wind machines just as though there were a real wind blowing. No wonder they called this the show square. It was a glum-slum,

a jetto-ghetto, authentic past time.

The performing people (and all the people on that part of 18th Street seemed to be performing people) were dressed in tight jeans and scalloped or ragged shirts, and even in broken shoes full of holes. It must have been very hot for them, but art is worth it. It was a memento of the time when the weather was not everywhere equitable.

There were in-dramas and in-jokes and in-situations acted out. The essence of the little dramas was very intense hatred for a group or class not clearly defined. There were many of those old-period enemy groups in the various drama locations of the City.

The lights were without pattern but they were bright. The music was without tune or melody or song or chord but it was very loud and very passionate. The shouting that took the place of singing was absolutely livid. So me of the performers fell to the ground and writhed there and foamed at their mouths.

It was a thing to be seen and heard — once. William and Kandy finally took their leave with bleeding ears and matter-encrusted eyes. They went along to 19th Street where there was a Mingle-Mangle.

It was now as dark as it ever got in the City but the Mangle was well lighted. Certain persons at the Mangle laughingly took hold of William and Kandy and married them to each other. They had bride and groom crowns made of paper and they put them on their heads.

Then they wined and dined them, an old phrase. Really, they were given fine cognac made of fish serum and braised meat made of algae but also mixed with the real chopped flesh of ancients.

Then William and Kandy padded down in the great Pad Palace that was next to the Mangle. Every night there were great numbers of people along that part of 19th Street, at the Mingle-Mangle and at the Pad Falace, and most of these folks were friendly, with their glazed eyes and their dampish grins.

*Pleasant most special to folks of the club!  
 Pleasant for manifold minions and hinds of  
 it!  
 Stuff them with plankton and choppings and  
 chub!  
 Simple the City and simple the minds of it.  
 —20th Street Ballad*

The world's resources are consumed disproportionately by the intelligent classes. Therefore we will keep our own numbers drastically reduced. The wan-wits have not strong reproductive or consuming urge so long as they are kept in reasonable comfort and sustenance. They are happy, they are entertained; and when they are convinced that there is no more for them to see, they become the ancients and go willingly to the choppers. But the 2 per cent or so of us superior ones are necessary to run the world.

Why then do we keep the others, the simple-minded billions? We keep them for the same reason that our ancestors kept blooms or lands or animals or great houses or trees or artifacts. We keep them because we want to, and because there is no effort involved.

But a great effort was made once. There was an incredible surge of will. Mountains were moved and leveled. The sky itself was pulled down, as it were. The Will of the World was made manifest. It was a new act of creation. And what is the step following creation when it is discovered that the Commonality is not worthy of the City created? When it is discovered also that they are the logical cattle to fill such great pens? The next step is hierarchies. The Angels themselves have hierarchies, and we are not less. It is those who are intelligent but not quite intelligent enough to join the Club who are imperiled and destroyed as a necessity to the operation of the City. At the Summit is always the Club. It is the Club in the sense of a bludgeon and also of an organization.

### **Will of the World Annals — Classified Abstract**

In the morning, Kandy Kalosh wanted to return to her home even

though it was nearly twenty blocks to the eastward. William watched her go without sorrow. He would get a westering girl to go with him on the lifelong exploration of the endlessly varied City. He might get a girl who was a talkie or even a readie, or bookie.

And he did. She was named Fairhair Farquhar, though she was actually dark of hair and of surface patina. But they started out in the early morning to attain (whether in a day or a lifetime) the Wood Beyond the World.

“But it is not far at all,” Fairhair said (she was a talkie). “We can reach it this very evening. We can sleep in the Wood in the very night shadow of the famous Muggers. Oh, is the morning not wonderful! A blue patch was seen only last week, a real hole in the sky. Maybe we can see another.”

They did not see another. It is very seldom that a blue (or even a starry) hole can be seen in the greenhouse glass-gray color that is the sky. The Will of the World had provided sustenance for everyone, but it was a muggy and sticky World City that provided almost equally warm from pole to pole, cloyingly fertile in both the land strips and the water strips, and now just a little but queasy.

“Run, William, run in the morning!” Fairhair cried, and she ran while he shuffled after her. Fairhair did not suffer morning sickness but most of the world did: it had not yet been bred out of the races. After all, it was a very tidy world.

There was a great membrane or firmament built somewhere below, and old ocean was prisoned between this firmament and the fundamental rock of Gehenna-earth. But the ocean-monster tossed and pitched and was not entirely tamed: he was still old Leviathan.

Along and behind all the streets of the World City were the narrow (their width not five times the length of a man) strips, strips of very nervous and incredibly fertile land, of salt water jumping with fish and eels and dark with tortoise and so thick with blue-green plankton that one could almost walk on it, of fresh water teeming with other fish and loggy with snapping turtles and snakes, of other fresh water almost solid with nourishing algae, of mixed water filled with purged shrimp and all old estuary life; land strips again, and strips of rich chemical water where people voided themselves and their used things and from which so many valuable essences could be extracted; other strips, and then the houses and buildings of another block, for the blocks were not long.

Kaleidoscope of nervous water and land, everywhere basic and everywhere different, boated with boats on the strange overpass canals, crossed by an infinity of bridges.

“And no two alike!” William sang, his morning sickness having left him. “Every one different, everything different in a world that cannot be traversed in a lifetime. We’ll not run out of wonders!”

“William, William, there is something I have been meaning to tell you,” Fairhair tried to interpose.

“Tell me, Fairhair, what is beyond the Wood Beyond the World, since the world is a globe without bounds?”

“The World Beyond the Wood is beyond the Wood Beyond the World,” Fairhair said simply. “If you want the Wood, you will come to it, but do not be cast down if it falls short for you.”

“How could it fall short for me? I am a William Morris. My name-game ancestor had to do with the naming as well as the designing of the Wood.”

“Your name-game ancestor had to do with the designing of another things also,” Fairhair said. Why, that was almost the same thing as the monitor man had said the day before. What did they mean by it?

William and Fairhair came to the great Chopper House at 20th Street. The two of them went in and worked for an hour in the Chopper House.

“You do not understand this, do you, little William?” Fairhair asked.

“Oh, I understand enough for me. I understand that it is everywhere different.”

“Yes, I suppose you understand enough for you,” Fairhair said with a touch of near sadness. (What they chopped up in the Chopper House was the ancients.) They went on and on along the strips and streets of the ever-changing city. They came to 21st Street and 22nd and 23rd. Even a writie could not write down all the marvels that were to be found at every street. It is sheer wonder to be a world traveler.

There was a carnival at 23rd Street. There were barkies, sharkies, sparkies, darkies, parkies, and markies; the visitors were the markies, but it was not really bad for them There was the very loud music even though it was supposed to be period tingle-tangle or rinky-dink. There was a steam calliope with real live steam. There were the hamburger stands with the wonderful smell of a touch of garlic in the open air, no matter that it was ancient chopper meat and crinoid-root bun from which the

burgers were made. There were games of chance, smooch houses and cooch houses, whirly rides and turning wheels, wino and steino bars and bordellos, and Monster and Misbegotten displays in clamshell-cloth tents.

Really, is anyone too old to enjoy a carnival? Then let that one declare himself an ancient and turn himself in to a Chopper House.

But on and on; one does not tarry when there is the whole World City to see and it not be covered in one lifetime. On 24th (or was it 25th?) Street were the Flesh Pots; and a little beyond them was the Cat Center. One ate and drank beyond reason in the Flesh Pots region and also became enmeshed in the Flesh Mesh booths. And one catted beyond reason in the honeycomblike cubicles of the Cat Center. Fairhair went and worked for an hour at the Cat Center; she seemed to be known and popular there.

But on and on! Everywhere it is different and everywhere it is better.

Along about 27th and 28th Streets were the Top of the Town and Night-Life Knoll, those great cabaret concentrations. It was gin-dizzy here; it was yesterday and tomorrow entangled with its great expectations and its overpowering nostalgia; it was loud as the West Side Show Square; it was as direct as the Mingle-Mangle or the Pad Palace. It was as fleshy as the Flesh Pots and more catty than the Cat-Center. Oh, it was the jumpiest bunch of places that William had yet seen in the City.

Something a little sad there, though; something of passion and pity that was too empty and too pat. It was as though this were the climax of it all, and one didn't want it to be the climax yet. It was as if the Top of the Town and Night-Life Knoll (and not the Wood Beyond the World) were the central things of the World City.

Perhaps William slept there awhile in the sadness that follows the surfeit of flesh and appetite. There were other doings and sayings about him, but mostly his eyes were closed and his head was heavy.

But then Fairhair had him up again and rushing toward the Wood in the still early night.

"It is only a block, William, it is only a block," she sang, "and it is the place you have wanted more than any other." (The Wood began at 29th Street and went on, it was said, for the space of two full blocks.) But William ran badly and he even walked badly. He was woozy and confused, not happy, not sad, just full of the great bulk of life in the City.

He'd hardly have made it to his high goal that night except for the help of Fairhair. But she dragged and lifted and carried him along in her fine arms and on her dusky back and shoulders. He toppled off sometimes and cracked his crown, but there was never real damage done. One sometimes enters the Wood Beyond in a sort of rhythmic dream, grotesque and comic and jolting with the sway of a strong friend and of the tidy world itself. And William came in with his arms around the neck and shoulders of the girl named Fairhair, with his face buried in her hair itself, with his feet touching no ground.

But he knew it as soon as they were in the Wood. He was afoot again and strong again in the middle of the fabled place itself. He was sober? No, there can be no sobriety in the Wood; it has its own intoxication.

But it had real grass and weeds, real trees (though most of them were bushes), real beasts as well as artificial, real spruce cones on the turf, real birds (no matter that they were clattering crows) coming in to roost.

There was the carven oak figure of old Robin Hood and the tall spar-wood form of the giant lumberjack Paul Bunyan. There was the Red Indian named White Deer who was carved from cedarwood. There was maple syrup dripping from the trees (is that the way they used to get it?), and there was the aroma of slippery elm with the night dampness on it.

There were the famous Muggers from the mugger decades. They were of papier-mache, it is true, and yet they were the most fearsome. There were other dangerous beasts in the Wood, but none like the Muggers. And William and Fairhair lay down and wept in the very night shadow of the famous Muggers for the remainder of the enchanted night.



### 3

*“Wonder-bird, wander-bird, where do you fly?”*

*“All over the City, all under the sky.”*

*“Wandr’ing through wonders of strippies and streets,*

*Changing and cha]llenging, bitters and sweets.”*

*“Wander-bird, squander-bird, should not have budged:*

*City is sicko and sky is a smudge.”*

*—1st Street Ballad*

“Run, William, run in the morning!” Fairhair cried, and she ran while William (confused from the night) shuffled after her.

“We must leave the Wood?” he asked.

“Of course you must leave the Wood. You want to see the whole world, so you cannot stay in one place. You go on, I go back. No, no, don’t you look back or you’ll be turned into a salt-wood tree.”

“Stay with me, Fairhair.”

“No, no, you want variety. I have been with you long enough. I have been guide and companion and pony to you. Now we part.”

Fairhair went back. William was afraid to look after he. He was in the world beyond the Wood Beyond the World. He noticed though that the street was 1st Street and not 31st Street as he had expected.

It was still wonderful to be a world traveler, of course, but not quite as wonderful as it had been one other time. The number of the street shouldn’t have mattered to him. William had not been on any 1st Street before. Or 2nd.

But he had been on a 3rd Street before on his farthest trip east.

Should he reach it again on his farthest trip west? The world, he knew (being a readie who had read parts of several books), was larger than that. He could not have gone around it in thirty blocks. Still, he came to 3rd Street in great trepidation.

Ah, it was not the same 3rd Street he had once visited before; almost the same but not exactly. An ounce of reassurance was intruded into the

tons of alarm in his heavy head. But he was alive, he was well, he was still traveling west in the boundless City that is everywhere different.

“The City is varied and joyful and free,” William Morris said boldly, “and it is everywhere different.” Then he saw Kandy Kalosh and he literally staggered with the shock. Only it did not quite seem to be she.

“Is your name Kandy Kalosh?” he asked as quakingly as a one-legged kangaroo with the willies.

“The last thing I needed was a talkie,” she said. “Of course it isn’t. My name, which I have from my name-game ancestor, is Candy Calabash, not at all the same.”

Of course it wasn’t the same. Then why had he been so alarmed and disappointed?

“Will you travel westward with me, Candy?” he asked.

“I suppose so, a little way, if we don’t have to talk,” she said.

So William Morris and Candy Calabash began to traverse the City that was the world. They began (it was no more than coincidence) at a market set in stone that bore the words “Beginning of Stencil 35,353,” and thereat William went into a sort of panic. By why should he? It was not the same stencil number at all. The World City might still be everywhere different.

But William began to run erratically. Candy stayed with him. She was not a readie or a talkie, but she was faithful to a companion for many blocks. The two young persons came ten blocks; they came a dozen.

They arrived at the 14th Street Water Ballet and watched the swimmers. It was almost, but not quite, the same as another 14th Street Water Ballet that William had seen once. They came to the algae-and-plankton quick-lunch place on 15th Street and to the Will of the World Exhibit Hall on 16th Street. Ah, a hopeful eye could still pick out little differences in the huge sameness. The World City had to be everywhere different.

They stopped at the Cliff-Dweller Complex on 17th Street. There was an artificial antelope there now. William didn’t remember it from the other time. There was hope, there was hope.

And soon William saw an older and somehow more erect man who wore an arm band with the word “Monitor” on it. He was not the same man, but he had to be a close brother of another man that William had seen two days before.

“Does it all repeat itself again and again and again?” William asked this man in great anguish. “Are the sections of it the same over and over again?”

“Not quite,” the man said. “The grease marks on it are sometimes a little different.”

“My name is William Morris,” William began once more bravely.

“Oh, sure. A William Morris is the easiest type of all to spot,” the man said.

“You said — No, another man said that my name-game ancestor had to do with designing of another thing besides the Wood Beyond the World,” William stammered. “What was it?”

“Wallpaper,” the man said. And William fell down in a frothy faint.

Oh, Candy didn't leave him there. She was faithful. She took him up on her shoulders and plodded along with him, on past the West Side Show Square on 18th Street, past the Mingle-Mangle and the Pad Palace, where she (no, another girl very like her) had turned back before, on and on. “It's the same thing over and over and over again,” William whimpered as she toted him along.

“Be quiet talkie,” she said, but she said it with some affection.

They came to the great Chopper House on 20th Street. Candy carried William in and dumped him on a block there.

“He's become ancient,” Candy told an attendant. “Boy, how he's become ancient!” It was more than she usually talked.

Then, as she was a fair-minded girl and as she had not worked any stint that day, she turned to and worked an hour in the Chopper House. (What they chopped up in the Chopper House was the ancients.) Why, there was William's head coming down the line! Candy smiled at it. She chopped it up with loving care, much more care than she usually took.

She'd have said something memorable and kind if she'd been a talkie.

## BY THE SEASHORE

The most important event in the life of Oliver Murex was his finding of a seashell when he was four years old. It was a bright and shining shell that the dull little boy found. It was bigger than his own head (and little Oliver had an unusually large head), and had two eyes peering out of its mantle cavity that were brighter and more intelligent-seeming than Oliver's own. Both Oliver and the shell had these deep, black, shiny eyes that were either mockingly lively or completely dead — with such shiny, black things it was hard to say which.

That big shell was surely the brightest thing on that sunny morning beach and no one could have missed it. But George, Hector, August, Mary, Catherine and Helen had all of them missed it and they were older and sharper-eyed than was Oliver. They had been looking for bright shells, going in a close skirmish line over that sand and little Oliver had been trailing them with absent mind and absent eyes. “Why do you pick up all the dumb little ones and leave the good big one?” he yiped from their rear. They turned and saw the shell and they were stunned. It actually was stunning in appearance - why hadn't they seen it? (It had first to be seen by one in total sympathy with it. Then it could be seen by any superior person.)

“I wouldn't have seen it either if it hadn't whistled at me,” Oliver said. “It's a Hebrew Volute,” George cried out, “and they're not even found in this part of the world.”

“It isn't. It's a Music Volute,” Mary contradicted,

“I think it's a Neptune Volute,” Hector hazarded.

I wish I could say it's a Helen Volute,” Helen said, “but it isn't. It's not a Volute at all. It's a Cone, an Alphabet Cone.”

Now these were the shelliest kids along the seashore that summer and they should all have known a Volute from a Cone, all except little Oliver. How could there be such wide differences among them?

“Helen is right about its being a Cone,” August said. “But it isn't an Alphabet Cone. It's a Barthelemy Cone, a big one.”

“It's a Prince Cone,” Catherine said simply. But they were all wrong. It was a deadly Geography Cone, even though it was three times too big to be one. How could such sharp-eyed children not recognize such an almost legendary prize?

Oliver kept this cone shell with him all the years of his growing up. He listened often to the distant sounding in it, as people have always listened to seashells. No cone, however, is a real ocean-roarer of a shell. They haven't the far crash; they haven't the boom. They just are not shaped for it, not like a Conch, not like a Vase Shell, not like a Scallop, not even like the common Cowries or Clam Shells or Helmet Shells. Cones make rather intermittent, sharp sounds, not really distant. They tick rather than roar.

"Other shells roar their messages from way off," Helen said once. "Cones telegraph theirs." And the clicking, ticking of Cones does sound somewhat like the chatter of a telegraph.

Some small boys have toy pandas or bears. But Oliver Murex had this big seashell for his friend and toy and security. He slept with it — he carried it with him always. He depended on it. If he was asked a question he would first hold the big cone shell to his ear and listen — then he would answer the question intelligently. But if for any reason he did not have his shell near at hand he seemed incapable of an intelligent answer on any subject.

There would sometimes be a splatter of small blotches or dusty motes on the floor or table near the shell.

"Oh, let me clean those whatever-they-ares away," mother Murex said once when she was nozzling around with the cleaner.

"No, no — leave them alone — they'll go back in," Oliver protested. "They just came out to get a little sunlight." And the little blotches, dust motes, fuzz, stains, whatever retreated into the shell of the big cone.

"Why, they're alive!" the mother exclaimed.

"Isn't everybody?" Oliver asked.

"It is an Alphabet Cone just as I always said it was," Helen declared. "And those little skittering things are the letters of the different alphabets that fall of the outside of the shell. The cone has to swallow them again each time, and then it has digested them they will come through to the outside again where they can be seen in their patterns."

Helen still believed this was an Alphabet Cone. It wasn't. It was a deadly Geography Cone. The little blotches that seemed to fall off it or to come out of it and run around — and that then had to be swallowed again — may have been little continents or seas coming from the Geography Cone; they may have been quite a number of different things. But if they were alphabets (well, they were those, among other things), then they

were more highly complex alphabets than Helen suspected.

It isn't necessary that all children in a family be smart. Six smart ones out of seven isn't bad. The family could afford big-headed, queer-eyed Oliver, even if he seemed a bit retarded. He could get by most of the time. If he had his shell with him, he could get by all the time. One year in grade school, though, they forbade him the company of his shell. And he failed every course abysmally. "I see Oliver's problem as a lack of intelligence," his teacher told father Murex. "And lack of intelligence is usually found in the mind."

"I didn't expect it to be found in his feet," Oliver's father said. But he did get a psychologist in to go over his slow son from head to foot.

"He's a bit different from a schizo," the psychologist said when he had finished the examination. "What he has is two concentric personalities. We call them the core personality and the mantle personality — and there is a separation between them. The mantle or outer personality is dull in Oliver's case. The core personality is bright enough, but it is able to contact the outer world only by means of some separate object. I believe that the unconscious of Oliver is now located in this object and his intelligence is tied to it. That seashell there, now, is quite well balanced mentally. It's too bad that it isn't a boy. Do you have any idea what object it is that Oliver is so attached to?"

"It's that seashell there. He's had it quite a while. Should I get rid of it?"

"That's up to you. Many fathers would say yes in such a case; almost as many would say no. If you get rid of the shell the boy will die. But then the problem will be solved - you'll no longer have a problem child."

Mr. Murex sighed, and he thought about it. He had decisions to make all day long and he disliked having to make them in the evening, too.

"I guess the answer is no," he finally said. "I'll keep the seashell and I'll also keep the boy. They're both good conversation pieces. Nobody else has anything that looks like either of them."

Really they had come to look alike, Oliver and his shell, both big-headed and bug-eyed and both of them had a quiet and listening air about them.

Oliver did quite well in school after they let him have the big seashell with him in class again.

A man was visiting the Murex house one evening. This man was by

hobby a conchologist or student of seashells. He talked about shd Is. He set out some little shells that he had carried wrapped in his pocket and explained them. Then he noticed Oliver's big seashell and he almost ruptured a posterior adductor muscle.

"It's a Geography Cone!" he shrieked. "A giant one! And it's alive!" "I think it's an Alphabet Cone," Helen said.

"I think it's a Prince Cone," Catherine said.

"No, no, it's a Geography Cone and it's alive!"

"Oh, I've suspected for a long time that it was alive," Papa Murex said.

"But don't you understand? It's a giant specimen of the deadly Geography Cone."

"Yes, I think so. Nobody else has one," father Murex said.

"What do you keep it in?" the conchologist chattered. "What do you feed it?"

"Oh, it has total freedom here, but it doesn't move around very much. We don't feed it anything at all. It belongs to my son Oliver. He puts it to his ear and listens to it often."

"Great galloping gastropods, man! It's likely to take an ear clear off the boy."

"It never has."

"But it's deadly poisonous. People have died of its sting."

"I don't believe any of our family ever has. I'll ask my wife. Oh, no, I needn't. I'm sure none of my family has ever died of its sting. I just remembered that none of them has ever died at all."

The man with the hobby of conchology didn't visit the Murex house very much after that. He was afraid of that big seashell.

One day the school dentist have a curious report of things going on in Oliver's mouth.

"Little crabs are eating the boy's teeth — little microscopic crabs," the dentist (he was a nervous man) told Mr. Murex.

"I never heard of microscopic crabs," Mr. Murex said. "Have you seen them, really, or examined them at all?"

"Oh no, I haven't seen them. How would I see them? But his teeth just look as if microscopic crabs had been eating them. Ah, I'm due for a vacation. I was going to leave next week."

"Are his teeth deteriorating fast?" Mr. Murex asked the dentist.

"No, that's what puzzles me," the dentist said. "They're not

deteriorating. The enamel is disappearing, eaten by small crabs, I'm sure of that; but it's being replaced by something else, by some shell-like material."

"Oh, it's all right then," Mr. Murex said.

"I was going to leave on vacation next week. I'll call someone and tell them that I'm leaving right now," the dentist said.

The dentist left, and he never did return to his job or to his home. It was later heard of him that he had first abandoned dentistry and then life.

But little Oliver grew up, or anyhow he grew out. He seemed to be mostly head, and his dwarfish body was not much more than an appendage. He and the great seashell came to look more and more like each other by the day.

"I swear, sometimes I can't tell which of you is Oliver," Helen Murex said one day. She was more fond of Oliver and his shell than were any of their brothers or sisters. "Which of you is?" she asked.

"I am."

Oliver Geography Cone grinned.

"I am."

Oliver Murex grinned.

Oliver Murex was finally out of school and had taken his place in the family business. The Murex family was big in communications, the biggest in the world, really. Oliver had an office just off the office of his father. Not much was expected of him. He seemed still to be a dull boy, but very often he gave almost instant answers to questions that no one else could answer in less than a week or more. Well, it was either Oliver or his shell who have the almost instant answers. They had come to resemble each other in voice almost as much as in appearance and the father really didn't care which of them answered — as long as the answers were quick and correct. And they were both.

"Oliver has a girl friend," Helen teased one day. "She says she's going to marry him."

"However would he get a girl friend?" brother Hector asked, puzzled.

"Yes. How is it possible?" Mr. Murex wanted to know.

"After all, we are very rich," Helen reminded them.

"Oh, I didn't know that the younger generation had any interest in money," Mr. Murex said.



“And, after all, she is Brenda Frances,” Helen said.

“Oh, yes I’ve noticed that she does have an interest in money,” Mr. Murex said. “Odd that such a recessive trait should crop Out in a young lady of today.”

Brenda Frances worked for the Murex firm.

Brenda Frances wanted round-headed Oliver for the money that might attach to him, but she didn’t want a lot of gaff that seemed also to attach to the young fellow. But now Oliver became really awake for the first time in his life, stimulated by Brenda Frances’ apparent interest. He even waxed a little bit arty and poetic when he talked to her, mostly about his big seashell.

“Do you know that he wasn’t native to the sea or shore where we found,” Oliver said. “He tells me that he comes from the very far north, from the Sea of Moyle.”

“Damn that bug-eyed seashell!” Brenda Frances complained. “He almost looks alive. I don’t mind being leered at by men, but I dislike being leered at by a seashell. I don’t believe that there is any such thing as the Sea of Moyle. I never heard of it. There isn’t any sea in the very far north except the Arctic Ocean.”

“Oh, but he says that this is very far north,” Oliver said with his ear to the shell (When you two put your heads together like that I don’t know whose ear is listening to whose shell, Helen had said once), “very, very far north and perhaps very again. It’s far, far beyond the Arctic Ocean.”

“You can’t get any farther north than the Arctic,” Brenda Frances insisted. “It’s as far north as there is any north.”

“No. He says that the Sea of Moyle is much farther,” Oliver repeated the whispers and ticklings of the shell. “I think probably the Sea of Moyle is clear off-world.”

“Oh great glabrous Glabula!” Brenda Frances swore. Things weren’t going well here. There was so much nonsense about Oliver as nearly to nullify the pleasant prospect of money.

“Did you know he has attendants?” Oliver asked. “Very small attendants.”

“Like fleas?”

“Like crabs. They really are crabs, almost invisible, almost microscopic fiddler crabs. They are named Gelasimus Notarii or Annotating Crabs - I don’t know why. They live in his mouth and stomach

most of the time, but they come out when they're off duty. They do a lot of work for him. They do all his paper work and they are very handy. I've been practicing with them for a long time, too, but I haven't learned to employ them at all well yet."

"Oh great whelping whelks!" Brenda Frances sputtered.

"Did you know that the old Greeks shipped wine in cone shells?" Oliver asked. "They did it because cone shells are so much bigger on the inside than on the outside. They would put a half a dozen cone shells into an amphora of wine to temper them for it. Then they would take them out and pour one, two, or three amphoras of wine into each cone shell. The cones have so many internal passages that there is no limit to their capacity. The Greeks would load ships with the wine-filled cones and ship them all over the world. By using cones, they could ship three times as much wine as otherwise in the same ship."

"Wino seashells, that's what we really need," Brenda Frances mumbled insincerely.

"I'll ask him," Oliver said. They put their two heads together, Oliver and the cone shell. "He says that cones hardly ever become winos," Oliver announced then. "He says that they can take it or leave it alone."

"After we are married you will have to stop this silly talk," Brenda Frances said. "Where do you get it anyhow?"

"From Shell. I'll tell you something else. The Greek friezes and low reliefs that some student of shells study — they are natural and not carved. And they aren't really Greek things. They're pictures of some off-world things that look kind of Greek. They're not even pictures of people. They're pictures of some kind of seaweed that looks like Earth people. I hope that clears up that mystery."

"Oliver, I have plans for us," Brenda Frances said firmly, "and the plans seem very hard to put across to you in words. I have always believed that a half-hour's intimacy is worth more than forever's talk. Come along now. We're alone except for old sea-slob there."

"I'd better ask my mother first," Oliver said. "It seems that there is some question about this intimacy bit, a question that they all believed would never arise in my case. I'd better ask her."

"Your mother is visiting her sister at Peach Beach," Brenda Frances said. "Your father is fishing at Cat Island. George and Hector and August are all off on sales trips. Mary and Catherine and Helen are all making

political appearances somewhere. This is the first time they've all been out of town at once. I came to you so you wouldn't be lonesome."

"I'm never lonesome with Shell. You think the intimacy thing will be all right, then?"

"I sure do doubt it, but it's worth a try," Brenda Frances said. "For me, you're the likeliest jackpot in town. Where else would I find such a soft head with so much money attached?"

"We read a seduction scene in a book once," Oliver said. "It was kind of funny and kind of fun."

"Who's we?"

"Shell and myself."

"After we're married, we're sure going to change that 'we' stuff," Brenda Frances said. "But how does Shell read?"

"With his eyes like everyone else. And the annotating crabs correlate the reading for him. He says that seduction scenes are more fun where he comes from. All the seductors gather at the first high tide after the big moon is full. The fellows are on one side of the tidal basin — and then their leader whistles and they put their milt in the tidewater. And the she seashells (Earth usage — they don't call themselves that there), who are on the other side of the tidal basin, put their roe into the water. Then the she seashell leader whistles an answer and that is the seduction. It's better when both moons are still in the sky. At the Sea of Moyle they have two moons."

"Come along, Oliver," Brenda Frances said, "and you can whistle if you want to, but that seawash talk has got to stop." She took big-headed, short-legged Oliver under her arm and went with him to the chamber she had selected as the seduction room. And Shell followed along.

"How does it walk without any legs?" Brenda Frances asked.

"He doesn't walk. He just moves. I'm getting so that I can move that way too."

"It's not going to get into bed with us, Oliver?"

"Yes, but he says he'll just watch the first time. You don't send him at all."

"Oh, all right. But I tell you, there's going to be some changes around here after we're married."

She turned out the lights when she was ready. But they hadn't been in the dark for five seconds when Brenda Frances began to complain.

“Why is the bed so slimy all at once?”

“Shell likes it that way. It reminds him more of the ocean.”

“Ouch! Great crawling crawdads — something is biting me! Are they bugs?”

“No, no — they’re the little crabs,” Oliver told her. “But Shell says that they only bite people they don’t like.”

“Wow, let me sweep them out of this bed.”

“You can’t. They’re almost too little to see and they hang on. Besides, they have to be here.”

“Why?”

“They’re annotating crabs. They take notes.”

Brenda Frances left the bed and the house in a baffled fury. “Best jackpot in town, hell!” she said. “There are other towns. Somewhere there’s another half-brained patsy in a monied family — one that won’t bring the whole damned ocean to bed with him.”

It was later learned the Brenda Frances left town in the same fury.

“That was an even less satisfying seduction scene than in that book,” Shell and his crabby minions conveyed. “We do these things so much better on the Sea of Moyle.”

So Oliver preserved his virtue. After all, he was meant for other things.

An off-world person of another great and rich family in the communications field came to call on Mr. Murex at his home.

“We weren’t expecting your arrival in quite such manner,” Mr. Murex said. He had no idea of how the other had arrived — he simply was there.

“Oh, I didn’t want to wait for a vehicle. They’re too slow. I conveyed myself,” the visitor said. They met as tycoon to tycoon. Mr. Murex was very anxious that he and his family should make a good impression on their distinguished visitor. He even thought about concealing Oliver, but that would have been a mistake.

“This is a fine specimen,” the visiting person said. “Fine. He could almost be from back home.”

“He is my son Oliver,” said Mr. Murex, quite pleased.

“And his friend there,” the visitor continued, “I swear that he is from back home.”

“There’s a misunderstanding,” Mr. Murex said. “The other one there is a seashell.”

“What is a seashell?” the visitor asked. “Are Earth seas hatched out of

shells? How odd. But you are mistaken, person Murex. That is a specimen from back home. Do you have the papers on him?”

“I don’t know of any papers. What would such papers indicate?”

“Oh, that you have given fair exchange for the specimen. We wouldn’t want an interworld conflict over such a small matter, would we?”

“If you will let me know what this ‘fair exchange’ is,” Mr. Murex tried to comply.

“Oh, I’ll let you know at the time of my leaving,” the visiting tycoon said. “We’ll settle on something.” This person was very much up on communications. He engaged Mr. Murex and George, Mary, Hector, Catherine, August, Helen, yes, and Oliver, all in simultaneous conversations on the same subject. And he made simultaneous deals so rapid-fire as to astound all of them. He controlled even more patents than did the Murex family, some of them overlapping. The two tycoons were making nonconflict territory agreements and the visitor was out-shuffling the whole Murex clan by a little bit in these complex arrangements.

“Oh, just let me clean them off there!” Mrs. Murex said once where she saw a splatter of small blotches and dust motes on the table that served both for conference and dinner table — the splatter of little things was mostly about the visitor.

“No, no, leave them,” that person said. “I enjoy their conversation. Really, they could almost be Notarii from my own world.” Things began then to go well in these transactions even for the Murex family, just when they had seemed to be going poorly.

The visitor was handsome in an off-worldly way. He was toothless, but his boney upper and lower beak cut through everything, through prime steak that seemed too tough to the Murex clan, through the bones, through the plates. “Glazed, baked, clay, we use it too. It spices a meal,” the visitor said of the plates as he munched them. “And you have designs and colors on the pieces. We do that sometimes with cookies.”

“They are priceless chinaware,” Mrs. Murex said in a voice that was almost a complaint.

“Yes, priceless, delicious, exquisite,” the visitor said. “Now shall we finalize the contracts and agreements?”

Several waiting stenographers came in with their machines. Brenda Frances was not among them — she had left the Murex firm and left town. The stenographers began to take down the contracts and

agreements on their dactyl-tactiles.

“And I’ll just save time and translation by giving the whole business in my own language to this stenographer from my own world,” the visiting tycoon said.

“Ah, that isn’t a stenographer there, however much it may remind you of the stenographers where you come from,” Mr. Murex tried to set a matter straight again. “That is what we call a seashell.”

But the visiting tycoon spoke in his own language to Shell. And Shell whistled. Then whole blotches and clouds of the almost invisible annotating crabs rushed into Shell, ready to work. The visiting tycoon spoke rapidly in off-worldly language, his beak almost touching Shell.

“Ah, the Geography Cone shell — that’s what the thing is — is said to be absolutely deadly,” Mr. Murex tried to warn the visitor.

“They only kill people they don’t like,” the visitor said and he went on with his business.

The annotating crabs did the paper work well. Completed contracts and agreements began to roll out of the mantle cavity of Shell. And all the business was finished in one happy glow.

“That is it,” the visiting tycoon said with complete satisfaction after all the papers were mutually signed. With his beak he bit a very small ritual wedge from the cheek of his hostess, Mr. Murex. That was a parting custom where he came from.

“And now ‘fair exchange’ for the specimen from back home,” he said. “I always find these exchanges satisfying and fruitful.”

He had a sack. And he put the short-legged, big-headed Oliver into that sack.

“Oh, that’s not fair exchange,” Mr. Murex protested, “I know he looks a little unusual, but that is my son Oliver.”

“He’s fair enough exchange,” the visitor said. He didn’t wait for a vehicle. They were too slow. He conveyed himself. And he and Oliver were gone.

So all that the Murex family had to remind them of their vanished son and brother was that big seashell, the Geography Cone. Was it really from the world of the visitor? Who knows the true geography of the Geography Cone?

Oliver sat on the shore of the Sea of Moyle in the far, far north. This was not in the cold, far north. It was on a warm and sunny beach in the

off-world far north. And Oliver sat there as if he belonged.

There hadn't been any sudden space-change in Oliver. There had been only the slow change through all the years of his life and that was never a great alteration — a great difference hadn't been needed in him.

Oliver was bright and shining, the brightest thing on that sunny morning beach. He had his big head and his little body. He had two shiny black eyes peering out of his mantle cavity. Oliver was very much a sea shell now, a special and prized shell. (They didn't use that term there, though. Seashell? Was the Sea of Moyle hatched out of a shell?) Six sharp-eyed children of the dominant local species were going in close skirmish right over that sunny sand and a smaller seventh child trailed them with absent mind and absent eyes. The big moon had already gone down; the little moon still hung low in the sky like a silver coin. And the sun was an overpowering gold.

The sharp-eyed children were looking for bright shore specimens and they were finding them, too. And right ahead of them was that almost legendary prize, a rare Oliver Cone.

In Outraged Stone

The look of indignation on the face of that artifact was matched only by the total outrage of her whole figure. Oh, she was a mad one! She was the comic masterpiece of the Oganta Collection. If stone could speak she would be shrilling. She was a newly catalogued item among the grotesque alien stonery called the Paravata Oneirougma.

You'd almost believe that she was alive!" was the laughing comment of many who watched her there in the display. "Oh, it's that she was alive once, and now she is furious at finding herself frozen in stone."

But that was the whole missed point of her outrage. She wasn't alive; and she never had been.

It was the cultural discovery time of the Oganta of Paravata. The Oganta had become things both in and interesting. Earth people had taken a seasonable delight in their rough culture, in their hominess, in their froggishness. Many Earth people from the scientific simmer were now visiting them and studying them. In particular were those of the psychologic phratry involved in this. A quick trip to Paravata would yield such theses as enhance reputations and make names. There the mysterious human undermind and underbody was atop and open to explore. There was no way that one could miss if he had the energy for

the encounter. The energy for it, though; that was the thing that separated the bulls from the steers and the homed heifers from the freemartins.

“Paravata has half again Earth’s gravity, so it calls out our strength. It has an atmosphere that keeps one on an oxygen binge, so it gives that strength something to draw on,” so had Garamask, that most vigorous Earthman, said of the planet.

Many Earth people wilted on Paravata. They couldn’t stand the weight (there was something wrong about the weight) and the weirdness; they hadn’t the strength for it. But others (and not always the ones you would guess) found a new strength and excitement there. It was bigger than life and rougher. It was vulgar and misshapen. It was a grinning challenge and it would smash anyone who wasn’t up to it.

But if you could make it there you could make it big. The loins bulged with new energy for these fortunates, and the adrenaline ran in rivers. It was a common and shouting and delirious world for those who could match it, and it was not only the body juices that were called into fresh spate. The mind juices sang their new tunes also, and the ideas came in tumbling torrents. They were pretty shaggy, some of those ideas, but there was nothing tired about them. Mind and body appetites grew steeply, almost exploded. There was an absolute horniness that came onto such visitors as had the capacity to take it. And a froggishness. What is the mystique about frogs?

The horned frog of Earth is a miserable sleepy little antediluvian and has nothing to do with these vigorous whorls. Let us take the name away from it and give it to another. Somewhere, on some world, there is a real horned frog, rampant with green comedy, outrageous in its assumptions, able to get away with worse than murder. The Oganta of Paravata were really such horned frogs, except that they hadn’t actual visible horns, except that they were frogs only in a manner of speakign.

Five young Earth psychologists (they all had the capacity and ruggedness for Paravata) were dining in one of those gape-walled inns on a ridge above the small town of Mountain Foot, on one of the stunning Paravata plateaus. Dining wasn’t the proper word for it: they were gorging. They were gorging with Oganta friends (an Oganta had to be your friend or one of you would be dead quickly). And they didn’t sit at table for their stupendous eating. This would be unthinkable to the



Oganta, and it was immediately unthinkable to the Earth people. For such action, they stood, they strode, they rollicked; they Tromped about on the big tables from giant bowl to giant bowl, and they grabbed and ate commonly from these common caldrons. They dipped and slurped, they toothed great joints of flesh-meat, they went muzzle-deep into musky mixtures. They were as mannerless as the Oganta themselves. They were already full of the coarse Oganta spirit and had even taken on something of the Oganta appearance.

On Paravata, one never reclined when he could stand (the Oganta even took their carnal pleasure leaping and hopping); one never sauntered where he could stride, nor walked when he could run. Aimless it all might be, but there was a burning energy and action in the very aimlessness.

They wrestled, they rolled. they walked upon one another and sat upon one another. "Och, I could hardly eat another bellyful," Margaret Mondo groaned happily as she rolled on one of the big tables among the bowls. Then a huge male Oganta landed in the middle of her belly with both feet and bounced. Ah, he'd have gone three hundred pounds on Earth, and things were half again as heavy on Paravata. "Och, now I can eat again. How I can eat!" Margaret chortled. We knew that Margaret, the earthiest of them all, wouldn't really give out so quickly. The dining customs on Paravata are extreme. If you can't take them, don't go there.

It was just at frost-bite and there was a light snow sifting. The five youngish Earth-folk were dressed near as barely as the Oganta. It would be many degrees colder than this before the walls of this mountain inn would be raised. The open air is always to be praised. On Paravata there were no heating fires ever, except the internal ones: and these burned hot.

"It's much more earthy than Earth," George Oneiron was saying. He was almost shouting. "It's everything, it's all through everything. The butterflies here are absolutely rampant, they're rutting, they're ravaging. We know that 'psyche' originally meant butterfly as well as soul. The psyche, the soul-mind-person, is our field of study, and here it is grossly material, fleshed and blooded. Even the Marsala Plasma of this place (there's no counterpart to it on Earth, there couldn't be), though it floats and drifts and jostles in the air. has a heaviness and materiality about it that startles one. Don't turn you're your back on one of those floating

blobs or it'll crash down on you like nine tons of rock. We'll solve the mystery of these plasma balls, or we will not solve any other mystery here."

The Oganta themselves had this sometimes weightlessness and this sometimes great weight. It was a part of the jokes they played. And the Earth people discovered that now they had it too, sometimes, mostly when they were in contact with the oafish Oganta. You are light or heavy when you think light or heavy.

The floating globs, the air balls, had more mysteries than their weight. There was their sound, the most raucous dissonance ever, when one caught it only out of the corner of the ear. But turn full ear on one, and it was all innocence and quiet. Incredible scenes flashed and lounged inside the balls when taken at a careless glance, but they lurked over when looked at straight. The globs made lascivious gestures, but what was lascivious about them? They were only charged air drifting in uncharged air (if there was any uncharged air on Paravata), The lasciviousness must be in the eye of the beholder. But what were the globs anyhow? "Oh, they're persons, some of our own persons, persons that we're not using right now," one of the Oganta tried to explain it.

George Oneiron, still avid to solve the mystery, was trying to take one of these plasma balloons into his hands. It was a yellowish, greenish, translucent, transparent glob of crystal gas (crystal gas? yes, crystal gas) the size of his own head. It challenged him. It was as if it shook its horns at him. He had it, it escaped him, he had it again, he grunted and grappled with it, he seized it out of the shimmering air and he didn't seize it easily.

"It'll go heavy on you," one of the Oganta grinned. "It'll cut you to shreds. Its weight is polaroid, just as ours is, just as yours begins to be. If it's in alignment it hasn't any weight; if it isn't it's crushing. You match it or it breaks you down. You shape with it or one of you breaks to pieces."

George Oneiron was quite strong, and the thing, after all, was only a floating glob of gas. "I have you now!" he cried when he had it. "Why do you follow and cling to the Oganta while you evade ourselves? I have you, and you'll spill your secrets to me."

"Poor George is reduced to talking to globs of air," Helen Damalis jibed, but Helen was no great one at understanding deep things.

Actually, it was a giant wrestle, and it was close there for a moment.

But it was the plasma ball, and not George, that broke to pieces. The Marsala Plasma shattered in George's hands, broke jaggedly into a hundred edged pieces, and clattered and crashed heavily on the stony ground. And George was cut badly on the hands and forearms and chest by the jagged slivers of it.

George cursed, he howled with quick pain, he laughed at the crashing puzzle of it: the floating balloon that turned into jagged rock. And he laughed at the half dozen Oganta of both sexes who came with hasty bowls and cries of "Here, here, to me, to mine."

George shook and dribbled his running blood into the Oganta's bowls. The big oafs loved the tang of blood, human blood or their own, in their strong stew. It was salt and condiment to them. And to George too. For he leapt barefooted onto the shoulders of the chuckling Oganta girls and trod them. It was bloody revel.

"Here, here, to me, to mine," the Earth girls also cried, partly in comedy, partly in novel passion. George Oneiron dribbled his blood into the crocks of Helen Darnalis and Margaret Mondo and Bonta Chrysalis, and leapt onto their shoulders also. Then, borne there by Margaret he poured his blood into the common caldrons on the largest table.

George was bleeding a surprising quantity of blood from the cuts of the gas globule, that floating thing that had shattered so quickly into vitreous daggers that were heavier than stone or metal. The loss of blood made him light-headed and gave him the froggish passion. But he quickly received more blood. All the Oganta, then the other four of the Earth people, slashed themselves with the dagger-shards of the broken globule and gave him their blood to drink. Now they were of one blood forever.

All five of the Earth psychologists were quite young adults. This would give them closer and quicker understanding of the Oganta, who were such vivid and outgoing oafs that even their dreams were on the outside. There was no denying that there was an abnormality about the Oganta, even beyond the differences of worlds and the differences of species.

The Oganta were a neotenic species who had lost, or almost lost, their adult form. As well as it can be explained in Earth context, they were teenagers forever whatever their age: and they seemed to age not at all after they had attained their high oafishness. There is no thing to which they might be compared in this: but imagine, if you dare, teenager attitudes and activities continued by certain individuals to a far greater

age, twenty-two years, twenty-three, twenty-four, even further. If such things happened on Earth where would Earth be? Imagine neotenic breeding, reproducing, and never attaining an adult form. That was the state on Paravata.

The Oganta of Paravata were large. They looked like a cross between humans and frogs. They themselves said that they were analogous to the tadpoles who had been unable to make the frog leap. But to human Earth eyes they looked like frogs and they leapt like frogs.

“But every frog is really a prince enchanted,” Bonta Chrysalis said.

“I’d say that every prince is rather a frog in disguise,” Philip Blax countered, “except that I’m sure it’s been said before, and probably by me.”

“Come here, Prince,” Bonta Chrysalis cried suddenly, and one of the big Oganta leapt into her arms and wrapped long froggy legs around her till Bonta herself could hardly be seen. But she’d made her choice. She’d taken one of the grinning gape-faced Oganta for her subject (subject for her study, and willing subject to her real whims) and she would not fail in this.

The Oganta were intelligent: or perhaps they only pretended to be, for a joke. They imbibed Earth knowledge easily and literally, but they didn’t take it too seriously. Their own culture was deliberately anti-intellectual, but they understood pretty well all that they rejected. They had an easy way with languages and lingos. They even had an easy way with the psychology texts that lay about there, fingering through them quickly, then burlesquing not only the words but also the ideas of them.

The Oganta also had (this is not fully understood, it is one of the mysteries that must be solved) that light way and that heavy way with weight.

The Oganta played one abominable instrument, the stringed hittur. But the five young Earthlings did not find it as offensive as older Earthlings would have. They knew that the whining tastelessness of it was an essential part of the Oganta. And they knew that even the vigorous Oganta could not be vigorous in everything. Even the hittur would be accepted, as one of the things that must be studied.

Helen Damalis had also acquired a boyfriend, an oaf friend, a leaping frog friend, from among the Oganta there in the mountain inn. She hadn’t done it as deftly or as regally as Bonta had taken hers. Perhaps it was that

Helen was acquired by the Oganta. Helen wasn't regal, she wasn't strong, she wasn't much of anything at the moment. She looked like a very small sofa with a very large Oganta lounging on her.

The Oganta liked the Earth folks. They slavered over them, they kissed them with great slurping sounds, they frog-leapt upon them. They insisted that the Earth folks should play the leaping game also. This was the mystic game of leapfrog, the oldest game of the worlds. The leaping is always upon and not over, and the fun of the game is in going from weightlessness to staggering weight at just the wrong moment.

"We'll need neither notebooks nor recordings." Christopher Bullock was saying very solemnly (vet he was very unsolemnly a-romp and a-tromp on a playful and trollish female Oganta), "for the Marsala Plasmii will serve for both. They are the crystal balls, crystal even in their gaseous state, and they record everything of the particular Oganta they attach to. We'll have everything down in the most solid recordings ever, petrified dream and person blobs."

There were five of these young psychologs from Earth.

There was this Christopher Bullock: we will have to call him a young man of muscular mind; there's no other term that will serve. The playful and trollish female Oganta had now picked Christopher up and draped him about her neck like a scarf: like a light scarf at first, then like a staggeringly heavy scarf. Christopher himself was learning a little about the light way and the heavy way with weight. There has always been something doubled about that name of Christopher, especially when it doubles into the name of Cristobal. There was once a man named Cristobal Colon (an old necromancer of Earth who doubled the Earth), though his name was regularized to Christopher Columbus. Though Christopher means Christ-Bearer, yet Cristobal is the phonetic equivalent of Crystal Ball and it has unchristly connotations. Just what is the real meaning of the crystal ball, and why was Christopher Bullock so interested in it?

The second of the young psychologs from Earth was George Oneiron. George was a split person, and the two halves of him were stark idealism and total depravity. In each half George was a nice enough fellow, but the contrast within him was awkward. The halves of George were at the moment served by two female Oganta one of them as spiritual, one of them as carnal as it is possible for neotenic frog-humans to be.

The third of the young psychologs from Earth was Philip Blax. Philip had healed his own split and had become (in advance) a very little like one of the Oganta in appearance and attitude. Nothing special about Philip really.

But the fourth of the psychologs from Earth was Bonta Chrysalis and she was something special. She was everything. She was magnificent in mind and body, splendid, soaring, regal, almost a flame. She was beauty and grace combined with power. She had always known the light way and the heavy way with things. The Oganta frog, who might be the prince enchanted, had frog-leapt onto her shoulder and perched there, and he was the largest of them all. But what is weight to a flame? And that big one, if he wasn't enchanted before, he was now, completely enchanted by Bonta.

And from Bonta Chrysalis we go to Helen Damalis, who suffers by the comparison. Helen wasn't much. She had less substance than any of them, less even than Philip. Helen wasn't distinguished by the primary brain in her head or by the secondary spinal brain which all good psychologs must have. She hadn't beauty of face or grace of body, not by Earth standards, not even by Paravata-Oganta standards. She was plastic, perhaps, and she might take the impression of these things, but she hadn't them of herself. She was an empty receptacle, an inelegant piece of pottery; yet she had a sullen intensity and an eagerness to be filled. She had a real hunger for life. One thing more: the Marsala Plasma, those gaseous blobs that were really crystal balls that could shatter into heavy fragments, followed and clung to Helen, as they did to all the Oganta, as they did not to the Earth people. And Helen clung very closely to her Oganta boyfriend, oaf friend, frog friend.

The fifth of the psychologs from Earth was Margaret Mondo. She had an earthiness beyond any of them This wasn't necessarily a roughness. Earth is more than that. It wasn't a lowness of any sort. Earth is much more than that. It was a primordial variety that she had, a many-rootedness. It was not true that Paravata was more earthy than Earth; you knew that was not true when you looked at Margaret who was Earth itself. She could contain them all, but nobody could contain her. So it wasn't an Oganta singling that she attracted, but a group, a trio of Oganta, two males and a female. She was too complex and vital to waste on a singling.

Ah, the young scientists had gathered up, or in some cases been gathered up by, their subjects. They went off with them now, riding them or ridden by them, in groups and tangles; off for study and for fun and for exploratory experience and for science.

The Oganta, so coarse and so open that they had their dreams on the outside.

And the five young mind-scientists from Earth.

Five? Not six? Christopher, George. Philip, Bonta, Helen, Margaret. Do they not come to six?

No. There are five of them. Count them again carefully. See, there are five of them.

The crystal ball, it is everywhere phony in its every form, and nowhere has it so many or such unusual forms as on Paravata. On Earth, as far back as one wants to go, to Babylon, to Chaldee, the crystal ball is in solid (though cloud-filled) form only, and it is the tool and scope of charlatans and oneiromancers. Even in those beginnings its users didn't understand its real form, and yet they preserved some slight pre-Earth memory of its various phases. On Paravata, by accident, it has its full phases. It may be in gas or liquid or plastic or solid form; it may go from one to the other in a twinkling (the phrase was coined for that change in that thing).

But what can really be seen in any crystal ball? Futures? Yes, futures, pasts, presents, scenes, dreams, images, dramas, primary persons, secondary persons. The ball may go tricky and freeze forever any of these fleeting things. Very often it will seize a secondary person and freeze this person forever. That person, then, will never have had any existence except in the ball, it will never have been anything except petrified.

To say that the crystal ball is everywhere phony is not to say that it is ineffectual. It is to say that it has misshapen or phony effect. But it does have effect. It works, it works.

From the Notebooks of Christopher Bullock Wasn't he the one who said they would need neither notebooks nor recordings?)

Bonta Chrysalis and Margaret Mondo perhaps had the most success with their projects. Bonta's, it would turn out, would be a badly twisted success. Helen Damalis surely had the least success, though she believed she was having the greatest. She was realizing herself at least, she claimed, In a limited way that was true. Christopher Bullock may have had the most fun, what with that playful and trollish female Oganta of

his, but even this is to be doubted. There was something unexpected to be found even in the troll. All the projects suffered in having no aim other than the mere study of the Oganta.

Could they be studied apart from their planet of Paravata? Were the Oganta isolated and discrete individuals? Were they interlinked groups with the personality residing in the groups? Were they mere fauna of their planet, a mobile grass of their world, manifestations, fungi? That was the trouble with the Oganta: they changed under the different points of view. As drops of water they were one thing, as small seas they were something quite opposite; as planetary oceans they might have a third and vastly different substance.

Philip Blax said that the Oganta themselves had no problems, that they were completely uninhibited and uncomplicated, that they were interchangeable modules of an unstructured society that knew neither anxiety nor doubt. Bonta said that in this Philip was wrong in a way unusual even for Philip. She said that the Oganta did have extreme anxieties, and that the better the intelligence and personality of the individual Oganta the greater was his anxiety. She said they had these anxieties because they had lost their adult form.

“It is well lost,” Philip had said, “and I might wish that we could lose our own.”

“You never had one and never will,” Bonta told him. “I haven’t my own completely yet, but I will have it. You are yourself like an Oganta, and it’s yourself you see when you look at them. You’re emptier than they are. You’re not like the ones who are superior in intelligence and personality.”

The plasma balls, the crystal balls, did make good notebooks and recorders; Christopher Bullock had been correct on that. The Oganta were such uninhibited (on the surface anyhow) and open creatures that they had their dreams on the outside of them: the psychologists from Earth had said that from the beginning but without really understanding what they meant.

“The plasma ball is a bucket,” Margaret Mondo said now. “It can become a bucketful of dreams, and it becomes heavier as it becomes fuller.”

No need for other apparatus to study Oganta dreams. Allow a new and fresh Marsala Plasma to hover over an Oganta as he slept, either in the



daytime or at night, and watch the plasma globe. The parade of dreams would be shown and sensed in that globe, vividly and colorfully, pungently and resoundingly. The Oganta dreamed better than they knew. Their dreams were more finely structured than their lives and had a greater diversity. They were real pageants, full of symbols and outright creations, enormous, overwhelming, spooky, powerful. Each superseded dream of the parade gathered itself like broken smoke and retreated into the center of the plasma to make way for more current presentations on the spherical stage nearest the surface. But all the dreams were recorded for all the senses and not one of them was lost.

George Oneiron made first discovery of a method of reconstructing the dissolved Oganta dreams. He'd affront a plasma ball that had been beside one of his Oganta subjects during her sleep period; he'd affront it and make it go heavy. He'd affront it still more and make it shatter into pieces. And each jagged broken fragment of it would display one of those bright jagged dreams. Turn one of those jagged fragments to another angle, and there was the same dream in another aspect, one that might have been completely missed at first viewing. George himself was very strong in the dreams of his two Oganta subjects, in a distorted form always, or in his two distorted forms.

Margaret Mondo said that George was doing it all wrong. She quickly discovered that there was no reason to affront the globes, still less reason to shatter them. There was no need to make them go heavy permanently they received less well when they were always heavy. Let them go heavy and light, and heavy and light again. Margaret herself could resurrect out of the globes any dream or constellation of dreams by caressing them with her own magic hands. She could reconstruct them in sequence or out of sequence, any way she wished.

Having three Oganta subjects, Margaret sometimes used three globes. But she could make the three globes merge into one, and emerge out of it again. Sometimes there would then be four globes and not three: one composite globe, three discrete globes. Margaret was studying three individuals as well as one small nation.

After a while she maintained master globes. The individual globes, after each dream period, were merged with their master globes; and then they were emerged from them again, emptied and ready for reuse. There was no limit to the amount of data that a globe might hold.

Indexing and recovering the data were other matters. Margaret could effect these things with her magic hands. The others hadn't hands so magic as Margaret's, but they managed. Except Helen Damalis. She managed her material not at all; it managed her.

The Oganta needn't be sleeping to project these dream sequences. They projected always, when leaping or shouting, when slaving or loving, when guzzling or gorging, while wrestling or rolling, while rattling the air with their whining unmusic, while burlesquing and buffooning, while unstructuring themselves and their minds. Even their waking dreams were better than their waking lives. Why did the Oganta put themselves down so?

There was a certain pathos in the pageanted dreams of Christopher Bullock's subject. the playful and trollish Oganta girl. Oh, she was playful enough, cloud-shatteringly playful! Sequences taken from her playful dreams and reveries (reverie is the wrong word, it implies quietness and musing; there should be a word to express the whooping happy calamities and catastrophes of this alien girl) would later be enjoyed by a certain clientele of Earth fellows in the manner of old stag movies. And she was trollish enough. She enjoyed her massive and misshapen burlesque of a body; it was the house she lived in. But there were other levels and aspects to the data that streamed and fountained up from this girl. There were odd caves and grottos in the mountain of her, some of them secluded and quite unexpected, rare ones, puzzling ones. It's a dull mountain that can labor (even trollishly) without bringing forth at least a small heap of gemstones.

There was nobility in the interaction of Bonta Chrysalis and her enchanted Oganta subject. There was something cracked or usurping about that nobility though.

"But they do put it on a little thick." George Oneiron said correctly of them.

"Blunt as I am, I was never that blunt, or that empty," Philip Blax attacked them, and with justice.

"Oh, climb down from it, Bonta," Christopher mocked. "You'll get too high for your own head."

Even the ever kind and ever magic Margaret Mondo wrung her hands and shook her head over the affair and said: "May never be so pretentious as that! May God Himself never be! There are limits to things, and they

pass the limit.”

Helen Damalis perhaps said the strangest thing of all about the affair: “If they can make a thing like that come alive, is it helpless for myself? Air lives and turns into talking and walking crystal. Stones live, and float like air in air. Frogs live. Imaginary princes live. All I ever wanted was to live. Is there magic enough for some of it to fall on me?”

Were they really so pretentious and outrageous, the things that Bonta and her charmed frog were attempting? This frog-Oganta had intimations and even expectations of adulthood now. Whether he had already had these intimations of himself or whether Bonta had given them to him is unknown, but he had them strongly.

There was now no more than one out of ten thousand Oganta who ever attained the old Rogha form the old adult form. And these few who attained it were isolated in it, without mate or breed, and usually very old. All the other Earth psychologists felt that this thing gone once should be gone forever. All the other Oganta felt that whatever state one should reach all should reach; that if they did break out of the top of themselves to a new state and development it should not now be that old and lost state. There must have been something wrong with that old advanced state or it would never have been lost. Perhaps it was too pretentious in itself, and too contemptuous of its underlay.

It was strange that Bonta Chrysalis, that everything Earthling girl, didn't understand this. Perhaps her own state was in her name and she was looking for a developed state for herself as well as for her subject. Perhaps, for all her easy attainments and brilliances, she herself was not adult and would not soon be.

It was strange that the enchanted Oganta himself, more intelligent and personable than the other Oganta, didn't realize that the old effective advanced form was now impossible. If attained now it would be mere sterility. On the word of the other Oganta of the immediate group, this one was the most gifted of them all. Why had he a faulty gift of vision in this?

Helen Damalis had the rockiest time of them all. She seemed, though, to be the most avid for the experience, even the very rocky experience. She had become attached to her subject, not he to her. And he was cruel to her with that offhanded and amazing cruelty of which only the Oganta are capable. He was a complete egotist and most of his dream sequences

were parades and pageants of himself only or himself against a dim background of other Oganta: other Oganta and a flurry of inferior creatures that were not easy to identify. “Like a cross between an Oganta and a chicken.” Was that more offensive than the Earthlings’ way of seeing the Oganta? “Like a cross between a human and a frog.” It was Margaret who pointed out that this was the Oganta way (or this particular Oganta’s way) of seeing the Earth-humans.

But there had come another person and appearance into the dream sequence of this cruel Oganta now, This was the appearance of Helen Damalis herself. Oh, he dreamed of her! That was something. It was as if it made her real. What matter that she was only the secondary element in a shaggy form that was somewhat hermaphroditic and miscegenated? She was there. That was something.

George Oneiron projected his own split person onto his two subjects. It was all very brilliant in the tensions that it set up. George was making parades of his double self through the Oganta mediums. These were sculpted and directed dreams of himself and he loved them. Later viewers would love them also. They were good. They were excellent. But they weren’t pure Oganta.

Margaret Mondo was wielding a small notion. To her own trio, two males and a female, she now added the boisterous, playful, trollish female of Christopher Bullock. And to herself she added Christopher: she’d always intended to do that. It might be that the development of the Oganta (oh, they did need development; it was catastrophe if they remained as they were for always;) would come through these small but accreting nations of them. There were nuclei being created, some by the Earthlings, some independent of them. The Oganta seemed the starkest individuals of any species anywhere, but it was only seeming. They began to accrete into these small nations now; and the personality was in the nations, not in the individuals. Happily this is not the case with many species: necessarily it was so with the Oganta. The small nation might be their new adult form.

The Oganta of Helen Damalis had broken all her bones and mangled her body almost beyond recognition. This pleased her: but it must not go as far as her extinction or all would be lost. She must hide, but she must maintain the relationship: so she must hide in the most obvious place of all. She attracted empty an Marsala Plasma and crept inside it. Then she

merged it with the standing plasma globe, her Oganta's crystal ball of record. He would see her there mingled with himself; but he'd not know that this was her alive, so he'd not extinguish her to her death.

Bonta Chrysalis had just now (and most unfortunately) succeeded in her own experiment. She had disenchanting her frog. She had produced her prince. He stood now in his pride and royalty: he was an adult in the old line and form; he was a Rogha.

He was very proud. He was very old (the Oganta showed no aging, whatever their years, but all the considerable years of this one were apparent in his new Rogha form). He was a royal Rogha, one of the elites, of the excellent ones. He was imposing in a way that neither Oganta nor human could ever be. He was extraordinary, he was magnificent, he was proud with the pride of the older angels. He was isolated. He was finished.

He was ridiculous He was silly.

"I'm sorry," Bonta Chrysalis said lamely. She was still in bondage to her own state and youth. Chrysalis-dreams never accord with reality, but how could she have been so very wrong in this?

"Sorry?" the Rogha asked in regal voice. "You should be happy, small creature, in your limited was. You've been the instrument. You have restored me. Something has restored me. Now I have inherited to my rightful station, that of a natural and destined prince. I look around. I find that I am more than that. I see that it is very late in the day. All the kings are dead. Now I am the king."

In poetic justice, the oafish and unsensing Oganta almost deserved such an adult form. But they had lost it. There is a Providence.

The times had come to their end. These seminar, these field trips, cannot last for ever. It was time for the five Earthlings to return to Earth.

The Oganta, the new, small but acerating nation of them, threw a bash for the five young psychologs from Earth. It was rowdy, of course. It was loud almost beyond bearing. It was vulgar, it was boisterous, it was cacophonous with the whanging and whining of the stringed hitturs. It was at a mountain inn, one of those gape-wall places. It was just at frost-bite, and a light snow was sifting. The five youngish Earth-folk were dressed near as barely as the Oganta.

Crudity, gluttony, guzzling and gorging. Tromping on tables and on torsos. Slurping and tooting from the common caldrons. The ancient

and mystic game of leapfrog, and the wrestling and rolling of bodies.

But it was not quite the same sort of bash as the Oganta had thrown for them at their coming. Niceties had appeared. A new element was there, an element that you could hardly pin down with your two feet, but there was a difference. Come back in a thousand years and you'd be able to see the difference clearly.

The bash bashed on. Margaret and Christopher went to gather up the various records. The crystal balls (now solid and stony, yet with clouds still drifting in them) that held the dream pageants and complexes of the curious small Oganta nation, and of their own curious human selves as seen through Oganta eyes.

George and Philip and Bonta came to them late in the day, bebash and besotted, and the five Earth psychologists were near packed for their return to Earth.

"There is one missing," Margaret said. "I wonder if it is worth picking up? Oh, I'll do it. It'll be inferior, but it'll be different. Sometimes there are overlooked things to be found in artifacts that are inferior and different."

"Which?" Bonta asked.

"The crystal ball of record of the singling Oganta," Margaret said, "of the one unsociable Oganta who hated humans so much. But we persuaded him to let a recording ball accumulate on him. Oh, I bet it's full of hate! I'll get it."

Margaret Mondo got the crystal ball of record of the Oganta who hated humans. It was small, but heavy and weird. It wasn't entirely full of hate, not yet. There was one other slight element in it, not quite extinguished, outraged and terrified and squalling for attention.

"Margaret, get me out of here," the stone screeched. "I'm trapped in it, I tell you. I want to mend up my bones and go home to Earth."

"My, aren't you an odd one." Margaret exclaimed. "What a dirty little masterpiece! He made you out of scraps of Bonta and myself. So how could he have made you so ugly?"

"Margaret, it's I, Helen Damalis! Get me out of here!"

"Why, how psychological of him. All the Oganta have an easy way with the lingos. He really named you that, did he, little hell heifer? Ah, what a shrilling little bad dream you are. One ugly clot of stone like this will show up the others, I in all their colorful beauty. Pack you away with the

others, I will, and you'll be the comedy piece of the collection."

"Margaret, I'm Helen. Can't you understand? Run your magic hands over my globe and get me out of here. I'm Helen, the sixth one of the party."

"But we were always a party of five. Ah, the look on you, it changes, it lowers, it explodes. There are stinking flames reeking about you not dream clouds. More, dirty dream, more. Hate, hate, hate! Then I'll freeze you forever in the stone in your dull hatred. Oh, what a perfect little deformity you are!"

"Margaret, I hate you," the stone squalled, "I hate everybody. I'm alive, I tell you. I'm real See me, hear me, smell me, get me out of here! I'm alive, I'm alive!"

"Yes, you're a lively little abomination, but never really alive. The worlds couldn't stand it if you were. More, un-creature, more, more if that's possible. Burn, scream, hate! That's it."

Then Margaret Mondo packed the little misshapen nightmare stone away with all the intricate and interesting crystal balls.

Go see it in the Oganta Collection. Really, it's the liveliest item of them all. Look at it there, wobble-eyed with horror and hatred, shrilling silently, pungent as brimstone, squalling against extinction, hating, outraged, absolutely petrified.

## DAYS OF GRASS, DAYS OF STRAW

*Fog in the corner and fog in his head: Gray day broken and bleeding red.*

*Ballads*  
—Henry Drumhead

Christopher Foxx was walking down a city street. No, it was a city road. It was really a city trail or path. He was walking in a fog, but the fog wasn't in the air or the ambient: it was in his head. Things were mighty odd here. There was just a little bit of something wrong about things.

Oceans of grass for one instance. Should a large and busy city (and this was clearly that) have blue-green grass belly-high in its main street? Things hardly remembered: echos and shadows, or were they the strong sounds and things themselves? Christopher felt as though his eyeballs had been cleaned with a magic cleaner, as though lie were blessed with new sensing in ears and nose, as though he went with a restored body and was breathing a new sort of air. It was very pleasant, but it was puzzling. How had the world been pumped full of new juice?

Christopher couldn't recall what day it was; he certainly didn't know what hour it was. it was a gray day, but there was no dullness in that gray. It was shimmering pearl-gray, of a color bounced back by shimmering water and shimmering air. It was a crimson-edged day, like a gray squirrel shot and bleeding redly from the inside and around the edges. Yes, there was the pleasant touch of death on things, gushing death and gushing life.

Christopher's own name didn't sound right to him. He didn't know what town he was in. Indeed he'd never before seen a town with all the storefronts flapping in the wind like that. Ah, they'd curl and bend, but they wouldn't break. A town made of painted buckskin, and yet it was more real than towns made of stone and concrete.

He saw persons he almost knew. He started to speak and only sputtered. Well, he'd get a newspaper then; they sometimes gave information. He reached in his pocket for a coin, and discovered that he didn't have regular pockets. He found a little leather pouch stuck in his belt. What's this? What else was stuck in his belt? It was a breechclout



with the ends fore and aft passing under his belt. Instead of pants he had a pair of leggings and a breechclout, three-piece pants. Oh, oh, what else?

Oh, he wore a shirt that seemed to be leather of some sort. He wore soft shoes that were softer than slippers. He was hatless, and his hair came forward over his shoulders in two tight long braids. He had dressed casually before, but he didn't remember ever dressing like this. How were the rest of the people dressed? No two alike, really, no two alike.

But he did bring a coin out of that leather pouch that was stuck in his belt. A strange coin. It wasn't metal: it was made of stone, and made roughly. On the face of it was the head and forequarters of a buffalo. On the reverse side was the rump of a buffalo. The words on the obverse of it read "worth one buffalo," and on the reverse they read "maybe a little bit less."

"And where do I put a coin in this contraption?" Christopher asked himself angrily and loudly. A hand extended itself, and Christopher put the coin in the hand. The hand belonged to an old wrinkled brown man, swathed in robes and folds of blackened leather, and sitting in the dust.

The old man gave Christopher a newspaper, or gave him something anyhow. It was on leather that was almost board-stiff. It was illustrated, it was printed in a variety of hands; and here and there it had a little hair growing out of it as though its leather were imperfectly scraped.

"Wait your change," the old brown man said. He gave Christopher seven small coins. These were neither metal nor stone: they were clay baked in the sun. The obverse of each was the head and fore of a badger, puffed and bristled and hissing in high defense. And the reverse was the reared rump of the same badger in embattled clawed stance.

"Price go down a little but not a whole badger," the old man said. "Take three puffs. It's close as I can get to even change." Wondering at himself, Christopher took three strong rich smokey puffs from the old pipe of the old man. He felt that he had received full value then. It was about all that he felt satisfied with. But is it wrong to feel unsatisfied, which is unsated? Christopher thought about it.

He went over and sat on a bale of rags outside the shop with the sign "Hot roast dog for sale or give." The bale of rags seemed somehow lively; it was as if there was no division between the animate and the inanimate this day. He tried to make something out of the strange newspaper or the strange day, or the newly strange man who was apparently himself.

Oh, the newspaper was interesting. It could be read one way or another: by picture, by stylized pictograph, by various writings and printings. Here were anecdotes; woolly, horny, bottomlessly funny anecdotes: and they were about people that Christopher knew, or almost knew. And all the people passing by (Christopher realized it with a chuckling gasp) were also people that he knew or almost knew. Well, what made them so different then? They looked like familiar people, they smelled like familiar people (which the familiar people erstwhile had not done), they had the familiar name that came almost to the edge of the tongue.

“But what town is this? What day is this? What is the context?” Christopher wailed out loud. “Why is everything so strange?”

“Kit-Fox, you call me?” Strange Buffalo boomed at him. Strange Buffalo was a big and boisterous man and he had always been a good friend of Christopher. He had? Then why did he look so different? And why was his real name, or his other name, now unremembered?

“Will the buffalo go to war, do you think, Kit-Fox?” Strange Buffalo asked him. “Do you believe that the two great herds of them will go to war? They come near to each other now and they swear that neither will give way.”

“No, there will be only the pushing and goring of a few thousand bulls, not much else,” Christopher said. “The buffalo simply haven’t the basis for a real war.” He was surprised at his own knowledge of the subject.

“But the buffalo have human advisers now,” Strange Buffalo said. “It began with the betting, of course, but now we can see that there is real cause of conflict on both sides. I dabble in this myself and have some good ideas. We are tying spear-shafts to the horns of some of the big bulls and teaching them to use them. And we’re setting up big bows and teaching them to bend them with their great strength, but they haven’t any accuracy at all.”

“No, I don’t believe they were meant to have a real war. It’s a wonderful dust they raise, though, when they all come together. It makes you glad to be alive. And the thunder of their millions of hoofs!” (There was the distant sound of morning thunder.) “Or is that a thundering in the mountains?” Kit-Fox — ah, Christopher was asking.

“Well, there is quite a clatter in the mountains this morning, Kit,” Strange Buffalo was saying in happy admiration. “The deep days, the

grass days like this one aren't come by easily. It's a wonder the mountains aren't knocked to pieces when the big prophets pray so noisily and wrestle so strong. But, as the good skin says, we must work out our salvation in fear and thundering."

"Is it not 'In fear and trembling'?" Christopher asked as he lounged on the lively bale of rags.

"No, Kit-Fox, no!" Strange Buffalo pealed at him. "That's the kind of thing they say during the straw days; not here, not now. In the Cahooche shadow-writing it says 'In fear and chuckling,' but the Cahooche words for thunder and chuckling are almost the same. On some of the Kiowa antelope-skin drawings, 'In scare-shaking and in laughter-shaking.' I like that. I wish I could pray and wrestle as woolly and horny as the big ones do. Then I'd get to be a prophet on the mountain also, and I'd bring in more days of grass. Yes, and days of mesquite also."

"The mountain is a funny one this morning, Strange Buffalo. It doesn't reach clear down to the ground," Christopher said. "There's a great space between, and there are eagles flying underneath it."

"Ah, it'll fall back after a while, Kit-Fox, when they have won or lost the wrestling for the day; after they have generated sufficient juice for this day, for I see that they have already won it and it will be a day of grass. Let's go have a rack of roast dog and a gourd of choc beer," Strange Buffalo proposed.

"In a minute, Strange Buffalo. I am in the middle of a puzzle and I have this fog in my head. What day is this?"

"It's one of the days of grass, Kit-Fox. I just told you that."

"But which one, Strange Buffalo? And what, really, are 'days of grass'?"

"I believe that it is the second monday of Indian Summer, Kit-Fox," Strange Buffalo was saying as he gave the matter his thought and attention. "Or it may be the first monday of Blue-Goose Antumn. We're not sure, though, that it is a monday. it sounds and tastes more like a thursday or an aleikaday."

"It sure does," Christopher — ah, Kit-Fox agreed.

A laughing, dying man was carried past by four hale men. This fortunate one had been smashed by bear or rolled on by horse or gored by buffalo, and the big red blood in him was all running out. "It works," the happy dying man cried out. "It works. I got a little too close to him and he

ripped me to pieces, but it works. We are really teaching those big bulls to use the spears lashed to their horns. Others will carry on the work and the fun. I bet that I've had it."

"A little blood to bless me!" Strange Buffalo cried out: and the dying man splashed him with the rich and rigorous blood.

"For me also," Kit-Fox begged: and the dying man smeared him with blood on the brow and breast and shoulders and loins. Two other friends, Conquering Sharp-Leaf and Adoration on the Mountain, came and were blessed with the blood. Then the man died and was dead.

"There is nothing like the fine rich blood to make a grass day sing in your head and in your body," Strange Buffalo exulted. "On the straw days they try to hide the blood or they bleed in a dark corner."

(What was all this about the grass days and the straw days? There was now a sordid dull-dream quality, a day-of-straw quality that kept trying to push itself in. For a little while, it begged, 'to reestablish rigor and rule and reason for just a little while.' 'Go away,' said the day-of-grass quality, 'The wrestle was won this morning, and this is a day out of the count.')

Kit-Fox and Strange Buffalo went in, past the booths and work areas of the coin makers, past the stands of the eagle-wingbone-whistle makers, and into the shop which had roast dog for sale or give. Strange Buffalo had a shoulder of dog and Kit-Fox had a rack of ribs. There was fried bread also, and hominy and pumpkin. There was choc beer dipped with gourd dippers out of a huge crock. Thousands of people were there. It was crowded and it was supposed to be. The man named Mountain twinkled in the air. Why had they not noticed that about him before?

Folks rolled up the walls and tied them. Now the strong smoke and savor could visit all the places, and the folks in every shop could see into every other shop. It was full morning and beginning to get warm.

"But I still want to know the date," Kit-Fox insisted, not quite converted to the day of grass, not quite clear of the head-fog that accompanies the sullen burning of the straw days. "What newspaper is this that doesn't have a date? I want a date!"

"Look at it. It tells," said Strange Buffalo.

"You want a date, honey?" the top of the newspaper writhed in sudden flickering of day-fire print. "Phone 582-8316 and I give you a real date." Then the day-fire print was gone.

"I hope I can remember that number," Kit-Fox said anxiously.

“Strange Buffalo, where is there a telephone exchange?”

“They are the same and single and right outside past the booths,” Strange Buffalo said. “You were sitting upon it when I came upon you. And you, you old straw-head, you thought it was a bale of rags.”

Kit-Fox went outside, past the booths of the stone-buffalo-coin makers and the clay-badger-coin makers, past the tents of the porcupine-quill dealers, to what he had thought was a bale of rags, a lively bale of rags as he now remembered it. Well, it was an ample lady in her glad rags and she was the telephone exchange lying there in the grass.

“I want to call number 582-8316,” Kit-Fox said uneasily.

“Here are a handful of dice,” the glad-rags lady told him. “Arrange them here in the short grass and make any number you want.”

“But proper once have numbers only to six,” Kit-Fox protested, “and some of the numbers are higher.”

“Those are improper dice, they are crooked dice,” the lady said. “They have numbers more than six and numbers less than one. Number out your telephone number in the short grass with them.”

“Are you sure this is the way to dial a number?” Kit-Fox asked.

“Sure am not sure,” the lady said. “If you know a better way, do it that way. Worth a try kid, worth a try.”

Kit-Fox numbered out his numbers in the short grass.

“Now what do I do?” he asked.

“Oh, talk into the telephone here.”

“That buckskin bag is a telephone?”

“Try it, try it. Drop a badger coin in and try it.”

Kit-Fox dropped the coin into the telephone. “Hello, hello,” he said.

“Hello, hello,” the lady answered. “That’s my number you called. You want a date, I wait for you awhile. Believe me, I get pretty tired of waiting pretty soon.”

“I don’t think this is a telephone exchange at all,” Kit-Fox grumbled.

“How else I can get guys so easy to drop badger-coins in a buckskin bag,” the lady said. “Come along, lover man, we will have a grand time this day.”

The lady was full-bodied and jolly. Kit-Fox remembered her from somewhere.

“Who are you?” he asked her.

“I’m your wife in the straw days,” she said, “but this is a grass day.”

They're harder to find, but they're more fun when you find one. They have something to do with grandfather's brother and that wrestling of his."

"Days of grass, days of straw", Kit-Fox said as he embraced the lady passionately. "How about a hay day?"

"You mean a heyday? Those are special. We hope to make them more often, if only the wrestle is better. They're fuller of juice than the grass days even. We try to make one now."

They made a heyday together (together with a whole nation of people); and it went on and on. Day-Torch (that was the lady in the glad rags, the lady who was Kit-Fox's wife during the straw days) bought an eagle-wingbone whistle from a dealer, and she whistled happy haunting times on it. The people followed Kit-Fox and Day-Torch out of town, out to the oceans of buffalo grass and blue-stem grass. They torched everthing that was dry and set the blue-black smoke to rolling. But the fundamental earth was too green to burn.

All mounted horses and took lances. They went out after buffalo. Word was brought to them that some of the newly armed buffalo bulls wanted to schedule battle with them. And the battle was a good one, with gushing blood and broken-open bodies, and many on each side were killed.

Strange Buffalo was killed. That big boisterous man died with a happy whoop.

"Strange Buffalo, indeed," one of the buffalo bulls said. "He looks like a man to me." When the ground there had become too soggy and mired in blood, they adjourned the battle till the next clay of grass, or the one after that. Bloody battles are fine, but who wants to spend a whole day on one? There are other things. Kit-Fox and Day-Torch and a number of other folks went to higher ground.

There was a roaring river on the higher ground, the biggest river ever and the loudest.

"Oh be quiet," Day-Torch said. "You've got the tune wrong." The great river ceased to roar. Day-Torch whistled the right tune on the eagle-wingbone whistle. Then the river resumed its roiring, but in this right tune now. This mightiest of all rivers was named Cottonwood Creek.

Henry Drumhead added his beat to the tune. Then the folks had a rain dance till the sharp rain came down and drenched them through. They

had a sun dance then, till the sun dried up the niud and began to burn the hides of the people. They had a cloud dance then. They had an antelope dance till enough antelope came to provide a slaughter and a feast. They had a pit dance, a fire dance, a snake dance, and an ashes dance: the ashes from pecan wood and a better condiment than salt to go with roast hickory wood and antelope. They had a feast dance. Then (after a while) a shakedown dance. They had a thunder clance and a mountain dance.

Say, it is spooky to come to the foot of the mountain itself and see the great gap between it and the ground! Rocks and boulders fell off of the bottom of the mountain and killed many of the people below. And, from the mountain itself, a broken, bloody, and headless torso fell down to the earth.

Helen Hightower — ah, that is to say the glad-rag lady Day-Torch — set up a rakish screaming, “The head, the head, somebody forgot the head!”

There was a thunderous grumbling, a mountain-shaking irritation, but the bloody head did come down and smash itself like a bursting pumpkin on the earth.

“A lot of times they forget to throw the head down if you don’t remind them,” Day-Torch said.

The meaning of the fallen torso and head was that there was now one less prophet or wrestler on the mountain; that there was now an opportunity for one more man to ascend to glory and death.

Several of the men attempted it by various devices, by piling cairns of stones to climb upon, by leaping into the air to try to grab one of the dangling roots of the mountain, by hurling lances with trailing lianas to fasten quivering in the bottom of the mountain. They played it out in the garish day there where all the colors were so bright that they ached. Many of the men fell to their deaths, but one ascended. There is always one who is able to ascend to the great wrestle when there is an empty place to receive him.

And the one who ascended was — no, no, you’ll not have his name from us yet.

Something was mighty odd here. There was just a little bit of something right about things.

2

Draftsman, draftsman, what do you draw? Dog days, draggy days,

days of straw.

— Ballads, Henry Drumhead.

Indian Summer. A period of warm or mild weather late in autumn or in early winter.

So Webster's Collegiate defines it, but Webster's hasn't the humility ever to admit that it doesn't know the meaning of a word or phrase. And it doesn't know the meaning of this one.

There are intervals, days, hours, minutes that are not remembered directly by anyone. They do not count in the totality of passing time. It is only by the most sophisticated methods that even the existence of these intervals may be shown.

There are whole seasons, in addition to the four regular seasons that are supposed to constitute the year. Nobody knows where they fit in, there being no room for them anywhere in the year; nobody has direct memory of being in them or living in them. Yet, somehow, they have names that have escaped these obliterations. The name of one of the misfit seasons is Indian Summer.

("Why can't the Indians have their summer in the summertime like the rest of us?" comes a high voice with a trace of annoyance. Not a high-pitched voice: a high voice.)

But all that is neither here nor there. It is yonder, and we will come to it.

Christopher Foxx was walking down a city street. Things were mighty even here, mighty neat. There was just a little bit of something wrong about their rightness. The world was rubbed, scrubbed, and tubbed; it was shaved, paved and saved; it was neat, sweet, and effete. Ah, the latter was possibly what was wrong with it, if anything could be wrong with perfection. The colors were all flat (flat colors had been deemed best for nerves and such), and the sounds were all muted. Christopher, for a moment, wished for a color that shrieked and for a sound that blazed. He put the thought resolutely out of his head. After all, he had for wife Helen Hightower, and he suffered much criticism because of her gaudiness and exuberance.

Christopher took a paper from the slot on the corner, noted that it was a day in May (he had a queer feeling that he had been uneasy about the date, and yet all that registered with him was that it fell within a familiar month). He entered the North Paragon Breakfast Club. It was there that



the Symposium would begin (it would last the whole day and into the night, and be hold at various sites) on the multiplex subject “Spacial and Temporal Underlays to the Integrated World, with Insights as to Their Possible Reality and Their Relationship to the World Unconscious and to the Therapeutic Amnesia; with Consideration of the Necessity of Belief in Stratified Worlds, and Explorations of the Orological Motif in Connection with the Apparent Occurrence of Simultaneous Days.” It would have been an exciting subject if Excitement had not become another of the muted things.

Buford Strange was already at the North Paragon, and with him were Adrian Montaigne and Vincent Rue.

“I have already ordered for ourselves and for yourself, Christopher,” Buford said. “It is Sheldrake, and I hope that you like it. They will not prepare it for fewer than four persons. ‘We can’t go around killing quarter ducks,’ they say.”

“That is all right,” Christopher said meekly. He glanced at the others three nervously. There was surely something familiar about them all.

Great blue mountain thunder! Why shouldn’t there be! He had worked with these men daily for several years. But, no, no, his edgy mind told him that they were familiar in some other and more subtle way. He glanced at the paper which he had taken from the corner slot outside. Something like quick flame ran across the top of it and was gone too quickly to verify. But was it possible that the flame had said “You want a date, honey? You phone —” Of course it was not possible. Clearly, at the top of the paper it was printed “A Day in May.” Clearly? Was that clear enough for a date?

“What date is this?” Christopher asked the three of them.

“May the eighth, of course,” Adrian answered him. “You’ve got today’s Journal in your hand and still you ask?”

Well now it was printed clearly there “May 8” and there was no nonsense about “A Day in May”; still less was there anything like “You want a date, honey?”

Some wild-looking children burst into the North Paragon Breakfast Club.

“Straw-Men! Straw-Men!” they cried at the four gentlemen there. “Straw-Men! Straw-Men!” The children buffeted the four men a bit, but other extravagant things that are since forgotten, and then they went out

of the Breakfast Club again: or at least they disappeared; they were no longer there.

“Why should they have done that?” Adrian asked, puzzled. “Why should they have called us that, and done the other things?”

“Why should who have called us what?” Vincent asked, even more puzzled.

“I don’t know,” Adrian said dully. “It seemed that someone was here and said or did something.”

“You’re witless, Adrian,” Vincent chided. “Nobody was here.”

“Straw-Man,” Christopher Foxx said softly. “I remember the word now and I couldn’t remember it before. I woke up this morning trying to remember it. It seemed to be the key to a dream that was slipping away in spite of my trying to bang onto it. I have the key word now, but it fits nothing. The dream is gone forever.”

“We will come back to this subject later in our discussions,” Buford Strange said. “I believe that your word ‘Straw-Man,’ Christopher, is a part of the underlay, or perhaps of the overlay, that pertains to our world and our study. There is a good chance that certain children, or perhaps dwarfs or gnomes, entered here several moments ago. Did any of you notice them?”

“No,” said Vincent Rue.

“No one entered,” said Adrian Montaigne.

“No. I didn’t see anyone,” said Christopher Foxx.

“Yet I believe that a group did come in,” Buford Strange continued suavely. “It was a group unusual enough to be notice . T en why didn’t we notice it? Or why did we forget, within a short moment, that we had seen it at all? I believe it was because the group was in a different sort of day. I am near sure that it is a group that lives in either St. Martin’s Summer or in the Kingfisher Days. Ah, here is the Sheldrake ready with all the trimmings! Drool and be happy. We shall never know such moment again.”

It was a momentous fowl, no question of that. It was good, it was rich, it was overflowing with juice. It was peer of the fowl that are found in the land named St. Succulentus’ Springtime. (What? What? There is a land named that?)

The four noble men (they were enobled by the circumstance) fell to eating with what, in days of another sort, might almost be called gusto. It

was a royal bird and was basted with that concoction of burst fruits and crushed nuts and peppers and ciders and holy oils and reindeer butter that is called — (wait a bit) —

“Do you know that the Sheldrake is really a mysterious creature?” Buford Strange asked as he ate noisily (nobody eats such royal fare in quiet). Buford acted as if he knew a secret.

“It is not a mysterious creature at all,” Adrian countered (he knew it was, though). “It is only the common European duck.”

“It is not only the common European duck,” Buford said strongly. “In other days it may be quite uncommon.”

“What are you saying, Buford?” Vincent Rue asked him. “In what other days?”

“Oh, I believe, possibly, in what the Dutch call Kraanzorner (Crane-Summer). Are we agreed that the other days, the days out of count, are topic rather than temporal?”

“We are not even agreed that there are days out of count,” Christopher objected.

“Drakes’ teeth, by the way, while rare, are not unknown,” Adrian Montaigne popped the statement out of his mouth as if in someone else’s voice. He seemed startled at his own words.

“Drake is really the same word as drakos, a dragon,” Christopher Foxx mumbled. “Ah, I was going to say something else but it is gone now.”

“Waiter, what is the name of the excellent stuff with which the drake is basted and to which it is wedded?” Vincent Rue asked in happy wonder.

“Dragons’ sauce,” said the waiter.

“Well, just what is the mystery, the uncommonness of the Sheldrake, Buford?” Christopher asked him.

“I don’t seem to remember,” that man said. “Ah, let us start our discussion with my, our, failure to remember such things. Vincent, did you not have a short paper prepared on ‘Amnesia, the Holes in the Pockets of the Seamless Garment’?”

“I forget. Did I have such a paper prepared? I will look in my own pockets.”

Meanwhile, back on the mountain,

back on the thundering mountain there were certain daring and comic persons rushing in and out and counting coup on the Wrath of God. It is a

dangerous game. These were the big prophets who prayed so violently and sweat so bloodily and wrestled so strongly, It was they who fought for the salving or the salvation of the days, in fear and in chuckling, in scare-shaking and in laughter-shaking.

The thundering mountain was a funny one this morning. It didn't reach clear to the ground. There was a great space between, and there were eagles flying under it. And the day, the day, was it really the first monday of Blue-Goose Autumn? Was it really a monday at all? Or was it a thursday or an aleikaday?

It was like another morning of not long before. The eagles remember it; the clouds remember it; the mountain wrestlers remember it dimly, though some of the memory has been taken away from them.

Remember how it is written on the holy skins: "If you have faith you shall say to the mountain 'Remove from here and cast thyself into the sea' and it will do it." Well, on that morning they had tried it. Several of the big prophets and wrestlers tried it, for they did have faith. They groaned with travail and joy, they strove mightily, and they did move the mountain and make it cast itself into the sea.

But the thunders made the waters back off. The waters refused to accept or to submerge the mountain. The prayer-men and wrestlers had sufficient faith, but the ocean did not. Whoever had the last laugh on that holy morning?

The strivers were timeless, of the prime age, but they were often called the 'grandfathers' brothers' by the people. They were up there now, the great prophets and prayer-men and wrestlers. One of these intrepid men was an Indian and he was attempting to put the Indian Sign on God himself. God, however, was like a mist and would not be signed.

"We will wrestle," the Indian said to God in the mist, "we will wrestle to see which of us shall be Lord for this day. I tell you it is not thick enough if only the regular days flow. I hesitate to instritict you in your own business, and yet someone must instruct you. There must be overflowing and special days apart from the regulai- days. You have such days, I am sure of that, but you keep them prisoned in a bag. It is necessary now that I wrest one of them from you."

They wrestled, inasmuch as a man slick with his own sweat and blood may wrestle with a mist: and it seemed that the Indian won the lordship of a day from God. "It will be a day of grass," the Indian said. "It will be

none of your dry and juiceless days.” The Indian lay exhausted with his fingers entwined in the won day: and the strength came back to him. “You make a great thing about marking every sparrow’s fall,” the Indian said then. “See that you forget not to mark this day.”

The thing that happened then was this: God marked the day for which they had wrestled, but he marked it on a different holy skin in a different place, not on the regular skiii that lists the regular days. This act caused the wrested Day to be one of the Days out of Count.

Prophets, wrestlers, praying-men of other sorts were on the mountain also. There were black men who sometimes strove for kaffir-corn days or ivory-tree days. There were brown island men who wrestled for shellfish days or wild-pig days. There were pinkish north-wood men who walked on pine needles and balsam; there were gnarled men out of the swampy laaiids; there were town men from the great towns. All of these strove with the Lord in fear and in chuckling.

Some of these were beheaded and quartered, and the pieces of them were flung down violently to earth: it is believed that there were certain qualities lacking in these, or that their strength had finally come to an end. But the others, the most of them, won great days from the Lord, Heydays, Halcyon or Kingfisher Days, Maedchensommer Days, St. Garvais Days, Indian Summer Days. These were all rich days, full of joy and death, bubbling with ecstasy and blood. And yet all were marked on different of the holy skins and so they became the Days out of Count.

“Days out of the Count,” Buford Stange was saying. “It’s an entrancing idel, and we have almost proved it. Seasons out of the count! It’s striking that the word for putting a condiment on should be the same word as a division of the year. Well, the seasons out of the count are all well seasoned and spiced. There are whole multiplex layered eras out of the count. The ice ages are such. I do not say ‘were such’; I say ‘are such.’”

“But the ice ages are real, real, real,” Helen Hightower insisted. (Quite a few long hours had passed in the discussions, and now Helen Hightower, the wife of Christopher Foxx, was off her work at the telephone exchange and had put on her glad rags and joined the scholars.)

“Certainly they are real, Helen,” Buford Strange said. “If only I were so real! I believe that you remember them, or know them, more than the most of us do. You have a dangerously incomplete amnesia on so many

things that I wonder the thunder doesn't come and take you. But in the days and years and centuries and eras of the straight count there are no ice ages."

"Well then, how, for instance, would local dwellers account for terminal moraines and glacial till generally?" asked Conquering Sharp-Leaf, ah, Vincent Rue.

(They were at the university, in that cozy room in the psychology department where Buford Strange usually held forth, the room that was just below the special effects room of Prof. Timacheff.)

"How did they account for such before the time of modern geology?" Buford asked. "They didn't. 'There would be a new boulder one morning that had not been there the day before. The sheep-herder of the place would say that the moon had drawn it out of the ground, or that it had fallen from the sky.'"

"You're crazy, Buford," Adrian Montaigne said with a certain affection. "Why the ice ages then? Why should they have happened, even in times out of count? Why should they have left their footprints in the times within the count?" Adrian had very huge and powerful hands. Why had they not noticed this before?

"I believe there was a dyanasty of great and muscular prophets and ghost-wrestiers who wanted to call out the terrible days of fimbul winter," Buford said in a hushed voice. "I don't know why they wanted such things, or why they sweated blood and wrestled prodigies to obtain them. They were men, but they are remembered as the frost giants."

"Oh my grand, grand trucks!" Day-Torch, Helen Hightower, rather, cried out. "Days of snow! Days of ice! Millions of them!"

"You aree saying that certain archetypes —" Kit-Fox began.

"— shook the pillars of Heaven till the snow and ice fell down for a million days, for a million days out of the count," Buford Strange finished.

"Strange Buffalo, ah, Buford, you are crazy," Christopher Foxx chided much as Adrian had. Christopher was talking, but the queerly smiling Adrian had now become the presence in the room. Adrian had the curious, under-rutile of the skin of one who has sweat blood in prayer and buffoonery and passion. Why had they not noticed that of him before?

"I could almost believe that you were one of the great challengers yourself, Strange," Christopher said to Buford, but he was looking at

Adrian.

“You strike me as with a lance, Kit,” Buford said sadly. “You uncover my mortification. For I failed. I don’t know when it was. It was on a day out of the count. I failed a year ago or ten thousand years ago. I could not make it among the great ones. I was not cast out to my death: I was never in. There was room for me, and an opportunity for the ascent, but I failed in nerve. And one who has aspired to be a champion or prophet cannot fall back to be an ordinary man. So I am less than that: I am short of manhood. But, sadly, I do remember and live in other sorts of days.”

“I believe that the aberrant days are simultaneous with the prosaic days,” Adrian Montaigne mused. Adrian was quite a large man. Why had they not noticed that before?

“No, no, they are not simultaneous,” Buford was correcting him. “There are the days out of the count and there are the days in the count. Those out of count are outside of time so they cannot be simultaneous with anything, You have to see it that way.”

“You see it your way and I’ll see it mine,” Adrian was stubborn. “Consider some of the aberrant times or countries: St. Garvais’ Springtime, St. Martin’s Summer (the Saints in these names were mountain prophets and wrestlers, but some of them were not at all saintly in their violence), Midas March (the very rich need their special season also: it is said that, in their special month, they are superiorly endowed in all ways), Dog Days, Halcyon Days, Dragon Days, Harvest May (what in the world is harvested in May?), All-Hallow Summer, Days of Ivory, Days of Horn, Indian Summer, Wicklow Week, Apricot Autumn, Goose Summer, Giant-Stone Days, Day of the Crooked Mile, the season called Alcedonia by the Latins. I tell you that all these days are happening at the same time!” This man named Adoration on the Mountain, or rather Adrian Montaigne, had a reckless sort of transcendence about him now.

“No, they do not all happen at the same time,” Striinge Buffalo was saying, “for the aberrant clays of them are not in time. They are places and not times.”

“Are there no night-time hours in the times out of time?” Vincent Rue asked.

“No. Not in the same sense. They are in another province entirely,” Buford said.

There was thunder in the special effects room of Professor Timacheff

om the floor just above them, cheerful, almost vulgar thunder, Timacheff taught some sensational (sense-response and also melodramatic ) courses up there. But how did he got such special effects anyhow?

“They do happen at the same time,” Adrian Mountain insisted, and he was laughing like boulders coming together. Quite a few things seemed to be happening to Adrian all at the same time. “They are all happening right now. I am sitting with you here this minute, but I am also on the mountain this minute. The thunder in the room above, it is real thunder, you know. And there is a deeper, more distant, more raffish thunder behind it which primitives call God’s-Laughter Thunder.”

“This gets out of hand now,” Vincent Rue protested. “It is supposed to be a serious symposium on spacial and temporal underlays. Several of you have turned it into a silly place and a silly time. You are taking too anthropomorphic a view of all these things, including God. One does not really wrestle with God in a bush or a mist, or ride in wildly on a pony and count coup on God. Even as atheist I find these ideas distasteful.”

“But we are anthropoi, men,” Adrian proclaimed. “What other view than an anthropomorphic view could we take? That we should play the God-game, that we should wrestle with a God-form and try to wrest lordship of days from him, that we should essay to count coup on God, I as a theist do not find at all distasteful.

“Why, One of them is failing now! It happens so seldom. I wonder if I have a chance.”

“Adrian, what are you talking about?” Vincent demanded.

“How could you do it, Adrian, when I could not?” Buford Strange asked.

“Remember me when you come to your place, Adrian,” Day-Torch cried. “Send me a day. Oh, send me a day-fire day.”

“And to me also, Adrian,” Kit-Fox begged. “I would love to do it myself, but it isn’t given to everyone.”

There was a strong shouting in the room above. There was the concussion of bodies, and the roaring of mountain winds.

“What in all the crooked days is Professor Timacheff doing up there this evening?” Vincent Sharp-Leaf asked angrily. “And what things are you doing here, Adrian? You look like a man set afire.”

“Make room for me! Oh, make room for me!” Adrian of the Mountain cried out in a voice that had its own crackling thunder. He was in the very



transport of passion and he glistened red with his own in bloody sweat. "One is failing, one is falling, why doesn't he fall then?"

"Help with it, Kit-Fox! And I help also," Day-Torch yowled.

"I help!" Kit-Fox yelped. The room shuddered, the building shuddered, the whole afternoon shuddered. There was a rending of boulders, either on the prophet's mountain or in the special effects room of Professor Timacheff above them. There was a great breaking and entering, a place turning into a time.

There came a roaring like horses in the sky. Then was the multiplex crash (God save his soul, his body is done for) of bloody torso and severed limbs falling into the room from a great height, splintering the table at which the five of them sat, breaking the room, splattering them all with blood. But the ceiling above was unbreached and unharmed and there was no point of entry.

"I am not man enough even to watch it," Buford Strange gurgled, and he slumped sideways unconscious.

"Timacheff, you fool!" Vincent Rue bawled to the space above them. "Watch your damned special effects! You're wrecking the place!"

Unquestionably that Timacheff was good. He used his special effects in classes on phenomenology that he taught up there.

"The head, the head! Don't let them forget the head!" Day-Torch cried in a flaming voice.

"I just remembered that Timacheff is out of town and is holding no classes today," Kit-Fox muttered in vulpine wonder.

"Make room for me! Oh, make room for me!" Adrian Mountain boomed. Then he was gone from the midst of them. He would be a factor, though, "in days to come."

Christopher and Vincent tried to straighten up the unconscious Buford Strange. They shook him, but he came apart and one arm came off him. He was revealed as a Straw-man filled with bloody straw, and no more.

"Why, he's naught but a poorly made scarecrow," Christopher Fox said in wonder. "He was right that one who falls back from it cannot become an ordinary man again. He will be less than man."

"That's funny. He always looked like a man to me," Vincent Rue said.

"The head, the head! You forget the head. Let the head fall down!" Day-Torch cried.

And the head fell down.

It smashed itself like a bursting pumpkin on the broken floor.

Under the town is a woollier town, And the blood splashed up and the head fell down.

Ballads, Henry Drumhead

## MR. HAMADRYAD

For some time there had been the feeling of an immediate change in the earthy globe, of a great turning-over that might replace the scatterbrained, petty, irascible and inefficient, though somehow human tone of the world with something that was cool, fastidiously ordered, immeasurably cruel, suave, silky, feline and altogether devilish. But the closeness, the reality of that change didn't sweep over me till I first met Mr. Hamadryad.

(I travel in coconuts, and it is ancillary to such travel that I have the fortune to meet such persons as Hamadryad.)

I believe that Mr. Hamadryad was the oddest-looking person I had ever seen. Surprisingly I regarded him so, for I first became aware of him in The Third Cataract Club in Dongola, and some very odd-looking gentlemen come into The Third Cataract. If you cock an eyebrow at someone in that place, then he's really odd.

There had been two sets of footfalls outside on the earthen corridor: one set were those of a somewhat splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots; the other were those of a barefoot person, but these latter footfalls were blurred by a sort of double step.

Only one of the persons came into the club though, and he was the splayfoot-seeming fellow in the soft skin or pelt boots.

"A Stony Giant," this person ordered from Ukali the barboy, "and the regular for lunch."

"Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad," Ukali said, and he set about building the Stony Giant.

Hamadryad's voice, when he ordered, had been a sort of muted howl or bark, but not at all unpleasant. The Stony Giant was a large, local drink. It was a huge goblet of palm wine sprinkled with the saline rock-dust of the region. It contained a stork egg, smashed in shell and set afloat in the liquid. And Ukali added a bit of Aladdin's Sesame when the drink was almost ready. The Stony Giant is a specialty of The Third Cataract Club and is found almost nowhere else in the world.

Hamadryad had a long nose. It was so long that it set him apart from the world, whether he wished it or not. After his vision had traveled the length of his nose and had come to the world itself, it had already traveled half the distance that might be expected of anyone's vision.

Hamadryad had brown eyes that seemed not to fix on a person but on a point several feet through and behind that person. Hamadryad gave me this gaze now. Then he smiled pleasantly enough at the point several feet through and beyond me. Hamadryad had a full head of hair, though of a peculiar crest and lay. He was a short person and somewhat stooped even in his shortness. But he was lively and quick of motion. His mouth — down there somewhere beneath that very long nose — had a twist of good-natured seriousness. In prospect he seemed a pleasant fellow: and, really, an odd appearance never hurt.

Ukali finished building the Stony Giant, and he give it to Hamadryad. The barefooted double steps were heard in the corridor outside again, going up and down, but no one entered. Hamadryad had paid for the drink with a pard d’or, a very old coin of Somaliland. Ukali gave him no change, but wrote a figure on the air. Hamadryad had set up tab for a week or more at The Third Cataract with the gold piece. Then this odd man came and sat with me.

“They have explained it all away in unconvincing words,” Hamadryad began with his pleasant howl or bark. “They make it seem like nothing at all. Five-hundred ton lintel stones, and they say that they were teetered up there either with log ramps or earthen ramps, and that the ramps were removed afterwards. Banana leaves! It’s nonsense, I tell you.”

“What is your profession?” I asked him.

“Cosmologist,” he said.

The barefoot walking was again heard outside, pounding up and down in that earthen-floored corridor, and I was very curious. What was that very heavy, very silky double step?

“Is your friend not coming in?” I asked Hamadryad and nodded towards the corridor.

“He is not my friend. He is my slave,” Hamadryad said. “He was in for a moment — you didn’t notice him — but now he has gone out again. I prefer that he remain outside.” Yes, I thought that I had heard this slave come in and go out again, but I had been unable to see him. I knew now that the double step meant the slave was a four-footed creature and that the powerful, silky tread meant the creature was five times the weight and freight of Hamadryad.

“Really, for even a minor megalithicon, such ramp-building would require the felling of a sizeable forest or else the moving of more dirt than

all the earthworms of the world have moved in all time,” Hamadryad was saying. “Even if I didn’t know how it was done, I wouldn’t accept that it was done with either log or earthen ramps. In Peru three-hundred-ton dressed stones are set into cliff faces that are eight thousand feet high, and sheer. At Baalbek there are thousand-ton stones set in the highest course. What sort of ramps might have been built up to raise such stones as those?”

“I don’t know. I’m not a ramp man,” I said.

“Really? You look very like one. I’m glad that you’re not,” Hamadryad said. “But I tell you that intensive on-the-site investigation would reveal the impossibility of any sort of ramp in any case. Always there is either a continuity or discontinuity of deposit of soil: nobody can build large ramps and then remove them again without leaving clear traces. Nobody, for that matter, could set very heavy lintel or other stones there on earth preparatory to raising them and not leave trace of them. But on the megalithic sites there are no such traces ever. One would be justified in saying that there have never been such ramps. One would almost be justified in saying that there have never been any such large stones on the sites were they not there on their high supports for all to see till this very day.”

I looked at Ukali the barboy. “Which of the nine kinds of nut is this?” I asked with my eye. Ukali made a jerky motion with his hand, the motion that a user of Arabic script will make when he tries to draw a Roman E in the air.

An E? Hamadryad was an Easter Island nut? He was interested in that small island that drifts always, at slow or at faster speed, towards a foreordained spot. Why, I’d have guessed that eighth or ninth on the list, certainly not first. He didn’t seem like such a one.

Ukali brought Hamadryad his lunch, the stomach of a suckling lamb distended with its original milk.

“You can check it with any fairly old stone structure,” Hamadryad was continuing with his pleasant low howl. “Examine long Barrows, Dolmens, Menhirs, Cromlechs, Henges, Temples, Pyramids and Kifo Pyramids, Sphinxes and Criosphinxes, Sanctums — is it not odd that all megalithic structures are somehow worship buildings and that there are no secular structures among them? — and you will always find the same things: stones that were and are too heavy to be lifted by any human device. The

largest modern-day walking crane will hardly lift three hundred tons, but very many of the old buildings have stones weighing from four to eight times that much. Really, there is no device, ancient or modern, that could have lifted them. They simply weren't lifted by machines or devices. All logging or ramping militates against itself very quickly. In no time at all it will become ninety-five percent inefficient. We have the drag, the friction, the longer resolution of angles. The lever-advantage quickly becomes disadvantaged; there is a plain stickiness of all materials that sets early limits. That is why no modern building, say of the last three thousand years, contains really large set stories. The only exceptions are a very few most special buildings built by us initiated ones for our own reasons."

Small flakes, pieces, grains of Aladdin's Sesame were moving about on the tabletop, and there was no breeze. I saw that Hamadryad was moving them by an act of will. He really seemed unconscious of his act, though it was taking a lot of his energy. He was practicing this thing while he ate and drank and talked, practicing it against the day when it would be required of him. This was a talent he wished to retain and develop.

Hamadryad, while clearly one of the nine kinds of nuts, did not seem like an Easter Island nut. Had I mistaken Ukali's sign?

"How are things on Easter Island?" I asked Hamadryad.

"Still drifting, and with an accelerated drift," he said. A shadow had come over him. For the moment he didn't look to be quite so pleasant a person as before he had. "The home is now about twenty-seven degrees south and a hundred and eight degrees west, but it drifts. I'm very much afraid it will reach the dread point in my own lifetime, even within the next two hundred and fifty years. Oh well, nobody remains top ape forever. There are cycles. There are aeons."

"What is the dread point?" I asked him.

"What? What?" Hamadryad barked. Then there was a little business that I missed. Hamadryad had cocked an inquiring eye at or through the barboy Ukali. I felt rather than heard the soundless question: "Which of the nine kinds of nuts is this?" And I flubbed Ukali's quick answer. I caught him just having made a jerky motion with his hand that a user of Arabic script will make when he draws a certain Roman letter in the air. But which? Which of the nine kinds of nut had Ukali signaled to Hamadryad that I was?

I felt very much put down, but that was only for a moment. Neither

Ukali nor Hamadryad was boorish. And now Hamadryad answered me with compassion and in his low, howling voice.

“Oh, twenty-nine degrees south and a hundred and eleven degrees west is about the center of it. I thought for a moment you were joking about holy things. But you really didn’t know, did you?”

“No, I didn’t,” I said, and I felt very ignorant. Ignorant, but determined to get whatever kernel there was in this nut. “But what is so special about the point that is twenty-nine degrees south and a hundred and eleven degrees west?” I asked stubbornly.

Hamadryad looked shocked. Did he still feel that I might be making fun of holy things? Then he answered me as if he were talking to a child:

“That’s the only point on the globe that God cannot see,” he said then.

“Why not?” I demanded.

“Ah, it is in the shadow of His own thumb,” Hamadryad said sadly. “He’ll not be able to help us when things reach that point. No one will be able to help us.”

I hadn’t a lot of business here. No coconuts were grown in the region of The Third Cataract, but we did import a few from the Indian Ocean coasts. And one cannot neglect any odd portion of his territory. Why should I feel like an outsider?

There was still the heavy, silken, double-step sound of bare feet in the dirt-floored corridor, the sound of a powerful animal walking on pads back and forth. I went out to look. There was nothing to be seen there, and the light was good. There was much to be heard there though — and quite a lot to be smelled. There was a little rush now of the feet coming more rapidly, coming at me. There was the stenchy animal signature. There was fear — mine. I bolted back into The Third Cataract Club. The fear didn’t follow me there, but a sort of snicker followed. It was an evil, feline chortle. It was a big cat laughing at a lowly human. So I knew what animal was pacing invisible in the corridor.

“Well, how do you get the big stones up there?” I asked Mr. Hamadryad in total exasperation.

“Oh, we use panthers,” he said simply.

“Panthers? Not leopards?” I asked. For the invisible animal in the corridor was a leopard.

“Panthers,” Mr. Himidryad repeated. “After all, a leopard is only a panther gone to meat.” But how can panthers aid in raising five-hundred-

ton lintel stones to great heights? I believe that Mr. Caracal came into The Third Cataract Club then.

Mr. Caracal was a suave, silky man with steep cars. Hamadryad didn't like Caracal, that was plain.

"Go back into it," Hamadryad ordered. "You have no right to be out of it."

Caracal showed a fastidious contempt for Mr. Hamadryad. Certain unclear things happened.

"This is rebellion!" Hamadryad shrilled. It may be that Hamadryad left the club then, or that both of them left. Anyhow, something intervened, and I didn't see Hamadryad again for five years.

2

Is the Yin-Yang alternation the same as the Monkey-Cat alternation? Even among the Chinese this is not certain. Just how strong is the compulsion that the dominant member — in the period of its ascendancy — holds over its contrary? Is it strong enough to rupture the Earth? Yes, Paracelsus thought so. Is it strong enough to move mountains? Yes, Mencius was sure that it was. Is it powerful enough to move continents? No, no, that's very unlikely. Powerful enough to move islands, it may be, but not continents. Avicenna believed that even small islands can only be moved a qadam or so a year. A man who sometimes comes into the Geologists' Club here says that islands can seldom be moved more than a foot a year, and that Easter Island is moving at only half that speed. He says that the tension is about the same between the Yin-Yang and the Monkey-Cat alternations — and that these are the two strongest contraries.

One can move grains of sand with a little disk held in the palm of the hand, if it bears either the Yin-Yang or the Monkey-Cat union-contrast. But increasing the size of the disk will not increase the effect.

Who do the Easter Island head-statues look like? What men or ghosts or darksome creatures do these huge, deformed dished faces properly belong to? Seldom in those years did I go to Rapa Nui on Easter Island without wondering about those things, without in fact climbing those slopes again to gaze at the giant stone heads there. I got to Gran Rapa no more than once a year — the coconut business was not really major there — but this question was with me all the time.

Were they cat faces? No, no, cats cringed in fear before those big



images. Cats do not do well on Easter Island at all. The really big cats there, they say, are still underground. Were the large images clog faces? Slightly, ever so slightly. Were they monkey faces? Not quite, no, not quite. What monkeys had such long noses as those? And where else might be found such longish, good-naturedly serious faces as here?

Well, there are a few such faces on Egyptian friezes, though not perhaps on any of the better known ones — not on any of those north of Qena anyway. A few such faces were on early Mexican terra-cotta figurines — but the Mexicans did not have either the monkey or the cat, and they tied the yin only and not the yang. There were quite a few of the faces in the old comic Chinese drawings that can only be called “Monkey Shines.” Some of them found in Gothic carvings ought to be named “Katzenjammern,” things that are too late to be honest Gothic, fourteenth-century things. The longish faces fire on Irish bronze-work and on Attic pottery, but not on the best of either. Deer sometimes have that long-faced look; colts and dogs have it more often. But these are all glancing coincidences, not the solid things.

Very rarely will a person have that look. And one person in particular had it, he on whose account I began to notice the big faces closely. This person was Mr. Hamadrynd, that lank-faced, long-nosed gentle man with the muted howl in his voice. He looked like that. But what was the main thing that the Easter Island heads, and Mr. Hamadryad, and all the other cited oddities looked like? What was it that pulled them all together? For the big Easter Island faces had only half their look; they implied their own intertwined opposites somewhere. One person had told me that those opposites were still sleeping in stone under the ground.

When next I saw Mr. Hamadryad, it was not in bright Africa, but in the dim and little-known interior of the North American continent. This was south of the domain of the Garfield-county wheat-growing tribe; somewhat north of those wide savannas of the bush-wool or cotton plants; west of the pecan forests and bosky bottoms of the Canadian River wilderness; east of the sunburned grazing range of those short-legged black cattle named Angus. It was some five days' portage — or two hours by motor — from the Alabaster Hills. It was at that dusty, trail-crossing town named Oklahoma City. Traveling in coconuts, I hadn't much business in that place. I had called on the Cross-Timbers Coconut Candy Manufacturing Company. And then I was in the Sun-Deck Club of that

town. I heard the now-familiar footfalls in the corridor outside: the steps of a splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots; and the powerfully heavy, silky quiet and blurred double steps of a barefoot being. Then Mr. Hamadryad came into the club alone. The other, the slave — if it were he — remained outside.

“A Ring-tailed Rouser, and the regular for lunch,” Mr. Hamadryad ordered in that pleasant, muted howl that I would always remember.

“Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad,” said Jane the beautiful bartender, and she set about building the Rouser. The Ring-tailed Rouser is composed mostly of clear, uncharted whiskey served in a quart fruit jar. There is added a sprinkle of gypsum dust from the Alabaster Hills and also the egg of the scissor-tail flycatcher, smashed in the shell and afloat in the liquid. And Hamadryad added a sprinkling of the small graiiis of the broincorn plant — these grains are very like Aladdin’s Sesame — as soon as the drink was set in front of him. The Ring-tailed Rouser is a specialty of the Sun-Dock Club and is found almost nowhere else in the world.

Mr. Hamadryad paid for the drink with a Jackson, one of those oblong green-paper-or green-skin-coins that were used in the middle barrens of the North American continent. He would have change coming but he let it hang. he was setting up tab at the Sun-Deck Club. He came and sat at my table.

“How did the panthers do it?” I asked him. He looked at me now. The five-year interval seemed to bother him only slightly.

“Oh, for the moment I’d forgotten what we had been talking about,” he said in that bemused, happy howl of his. “I suppose you could say that they did it in the nature of ransom. They had so much agony owing, and besides they are our slaves. But the real explanation will go back to the foundations of the world, and it concerns a partial tinfotlnding or moving of those foundations. You didn’t think you were the first, did you? You weren’t. You were the last.”

“Didn’t think who was the first what?” I asked him.

“You, you people of the new line,” he said. “You weren’t the first, and you sure were not the strongest or the most intense. Your own encounter, well, it would have been a pretty small thing to those who have known real encounters. After your fall, it was hardly what we would call a fall, without laughing. Our own fall, now that was something.”

“Tell me about it,” I said.

“I may not,” he told me. “‘Twould blow your mind and your ears. But there were quite a number of races who had covenants, before Abraham, before Adam. These covenants were towering things, and their breakings were of immeasurable depth. There was violence and earthquake and earth-shattering in those abysmal falls. After such horrors, God repented himself and made each succeeding test more gentle. If not, no flesh would have remained anywhere. And yet ourselves were quite near the end of the series. We never know the real burning and shrieking horror of the early ones.

“We were dooined to be the slaves of slaves. For this, two races — ourselves another — were chained together. I do not know whether I can explain this relationship to you, the closeness that accompanies an utter alienation, the apposition and the opposition. Our counterparts in this are something like your own shoulder angels?”

“Shoulder angels?” I asked. I had never heard quite that term.

“You know them though you daily them,” Hamadryad said. “But your own angels, who are they really? I have heard that you yourselves usually do not see them, but every other race of magus, ghost, animal, creature or being sees them. Most of these folks believe that your refusal to see your shoulder angels is a most cruel disdain. I’ve come to the conclusion, though, that it’s really blindness and inattention on your part. But are they really a race coupled to you for punishment? Are they even a separate race at all? “It is suggested that they are your own twins somehow deformed.

It is guessed that they are your afterbirths somewhat mutated. Sometimes they are actually attached to you as small, fleshy extensions growing out of tile human shoulders; and these, though you often deny it, can be seen by yourselves as well as by others. But these latter are usually covered up, by clothing and by silent conspiracy. But what are they really?

“With us there are two clear races involved. Our enemies serve as our angels and our slaves for an era. Then it all turns over, in a strange way and out of the sight of God. Then we must serve as angels and slaves to our enemies for a long era. We will then be forced to move and lift and carry, to hew and to shape. We, the great ones, will become the slaves of the slinking heathers, and we must serve out the ransom.”

Jane, the beautiful waitress, brought Hamadryad’s lunch and set it

before him. It was the stomach of suckling calf distended with its first milk.

“I still don’t see how the big, heavy lintel stones may be moved by means of panthers,” I said.

“Things much greater than lintel stones,” Hamadryad howled softly and dreamily. “Do you know which are the lowest and highest of all folks who have received the Spirit or the pseudo-spirit? The lowest of all are the gibberish people who misunderstand the old business of ‘speaking in tongues.’ But even in your scripture the verb used for this speaking is selected carefully from several. It means to speak clearly. For God is not the God of gibberish. These are the lowest of all folks, those who say ‘Lord, I am holy. I can talk gibberish.’ And a short million miles above the gibberish people are the snake-handlers. We, even more than yourselves, have an abhorrence touched with fear concerning snakes. It raises my hackles every time I handle a deadly snake, and I do have hackles.”

Yes, Hamadryad did have hackles in the peculiar crest and lay of his lank hair.

“Snake-handlers bring courage to the affair,” said Hamadryad, “in contrast to the gibberish people who bring nothing. But greatest of all is the Faith-that-Moves-Mountains. Those who bring most are the mountain-movers, the elite of all the preternaturals, of all those who are tinder the punishment and the ransom. I tell you that mountain-moving is very hard to fake. Mountain-moving is the most terrible task that has ever been given to man or magus to do.”

“What are you doing in the barrens of North America?” I asked Hamadryad. “In particular, what are you doing here in the canton of Oklahoma?”

“I had a report, and I came to observe the Black Mesa out in the corner of this canton,” he said. “I really came to observe a now and valid talent which had appeared in the region. It’s of the enemy, of the slaves, but it’s worth observing. I watched the working of it for three days, and it took a lot out of me. Did you know that the Black Mesa moved nine inches in three days ending yesterday?”

“I heard that there were earthquake tremors in that region.”

“There was a young and untrained puma in that region, an unslaved natural talent,” Hamadryad said. “Though I loathe all cats, yet I admired that young puma. By soul-wrenching sacrifice, by towering mentality, by

garish ghastliness, by rampant animality that young puma moved that mountain named the Black Mesa nine inches in three days. I saw this. I attest it. Before God, he moved it! And he did it not even for the ransom yet. I lo was a free puma. His was Faith, pure and undefiled.”

“What has that to do with moving lintel stones?” I asked.

“It has to do with the moving of a mountain that is the equivalent of many millions of lintel stones,” Hamadryad said. Hamadryad was quite shaken even in the telling of this, and I began to wonder about this person. Hamadryad had changed somewhat in appearance in the five years since I had seen him last. His oddities were all sharpened. Whatever it was that he represented, he represented it much more strongly now. Hamadryad had once mentioned the Criosphinxes, those ram-headed sphinxes of Greece and Egypt. But he now reminded me of the Man-Drill Sphinx at Baidoa in upper Itiba.

Small flakes, pieces, grains of broomcorn were moving about on the tabletop, and there was no breeze. I saw that Hamadryad was moving them by an act of will. He really seemed unconscious of his act, though it was taking a lot of energy. He was practicing this thing while he ate and drank and talked. It was a talent which he wished to retain and develop. But it would have to be developed many millionfold to equal that of the young enemy puma who had moved the Black Mesa nine inches. Was it mountains to be moved that were overshadowing this likeable man?

“Were there mountains involved in your own original encounter?” I asked.

“Aye, Magic Mountains, Floating Mountains!” he cried with soaring memory. “But it was more than mountains, more than ships, more than islands. It was a Pavilion! Ah, what a Pavilion we did have once! It floated on the water, and it bore mountains and forests and gardens on its back. Did God ever give so magnificent an exile-float to anyone else? This was the tent that had been pitched in the pleasant place, and originally it had been larger than the world. You have heard of ‘floats’ in parades? Ours was the original of those moving flower-tiered wagons, or the beautiful juggernauts that moved over land and sea or the ‘floats’ that were floats indeed. You have, perhaps, heard the term ‘watercolors’ as applied to art? The water, like a witch’s oils, /Burnt green, and blue and white’ — as a poet (I sometimes think he was one of us) has written. Our moving mountain, our floating garden was the primordial watercolor in that it

was a pandemonium — and it had recently been a panangelicum — of hues so vivid as to be scandal to the land. Aye, we were expelled from the land; we and our verdant, tiered and terraced mountain that was like a mile-high platter of fruits. We were marooned on our mountain-island-bergo, marooned on the blue and green and scarlet mirroring ocean: for maroon is a color as well as a condition. This was our purple exile on the royal and purple sea.”

“It sounds wonderful, but what are you talking about?” I asked him.

“Oh, it was full of wonder, but it wasn’t a pleasure-wonder,” he said sadly as though he remembered it himself. “The deprivation was starker for us, perhaps, than for any other race. It may be for that reason we were provided with a grander vehicle. All left the garden with pieces of the garden, but some went with mere clods of that holy place. I have heard that you, yourselves, had to walk out.”

“Oh, from the garden? Yes, I guess so,” I said.

“We floated out of the garden that was in the middle of the waters,” Hamadryad recited. “We floated away on an aromatic, many-colored mountain-island that was fruitful beyond description. Oh, by the red dew of Olivet but it was fair! And we were kings yet, though fallen. We forced our slaves for continuing ransom to how and transport and set up great idols of ourselves.

“But then we drifted. We wanted to go one way. Our slaves, the cats, wanted to go another; and theirs was the agony, but theirs was also the movement. To them had been given, beyond ourselves, the terrible mentality and spirit to move stones and mountains and islands. So we drifted in the direction selected by our slaves, and it wasn’t a random direction. Then pieces began to break off our beautiful island of exile.”

A feline chill had entered the room. Hamadryad shivered and shivered, and he seemed unsure of himself.

“Which pieces broke off your exile island?” I asked him.

“Oh, hundreds of pieces until what is now left is quite small and not is green as it might be. Madagascar was the largest of those early pieces to break away, and it drifted back partly toward the direction of our origin. It is still there as a mystery and a sign; it doesn’t belong in the contemporary world. You know, of course, that ‘Cats and Monkeys Island’ is the literal meaning of Madagascar?”

“I know,” I said. But Hamadryad had risen full of passion, red and

purple of feice, shaking and gibbering.

“Get back, get back, go back into it!” Hamadryad howled suddenly and furiously. And what had brought on such a tempest of passion?

Mr. Caracal had come into the room, and the footfalls of the corridor had come with him. Mr. Caracal was the thing that had been in the corridor invisible. And yet he was a highly visible, suave, silky man with steep ears.

“Go back into it,” Hamadryad howled. “You have no right to be out of it!”

But Caracal grinned with fastidious contempt. He looked as though he might tear Hamadryad apart. There was a terrible battle being fought somewhere, in doubtful arena, and Caracal was defeating Hamodrynci in furious conflict.

“Is Mr. Caracal a club member?” I asked Jane the beautiful bartender. “He is making one of your clients very unhappy.”

“I’ll not interfere with that one,” Jane disclaimed. “You never know who is going to end up top cat.”

“This is rebellion!” Hamadryad screeched. “Your time hasn’t quite come.”

Caracal was advancing on Hamadryad, and it really seemed as if he would eat him alive ind complete as he trembled there. Somehow, Hamadryad left the Sun-Deck Club then in a stormy scene. It is likely that both of those odd persons left.

Something intervened anyhow, and I didn’t see Mr. Hamadryad again for several years.

3

Madagascar, I had found, didn’t really mean “Cats and Monkeys Island.” Hamadryad had made that up, and I had agreed with him so as not to seem ignorant. And there are no holy records of earlier expulsions of other races from the Pleasure Place. Well, perhaps somewhere there are earlier and less holy records of such.

Following as I do the coconut trade, I happened again to be at that most unproductive base of it, Rapa Nui on Easter Island. I was in Drill’s Marine Bar. I had been asking about and thinking about a certain shadow that for countless ages has been on the face of the Earth. I was worried that Easter Island, now drifting at the wild speed of more than three hundred feet a year, had begun to enter that shadow or blind spot. And it

had begun to. Several pieces of beach were already under the shadow, and they seemed void of life, void of light, void of meaning. Only irrational things could happen in those umbrageous places. But if they happened, they would happen for the whole world.

Could there really be such a blind spot on Earth? And why had it seldom been noted in the past? I asked the proprietor Drill about it, and he stroked his nose as he answered.

“Yes, the spot is indeed there and it has always been there,” Drill told me. “And why has it seldom been noted? The reason that it is little noted is simply that there is nothing noteworthy about it. No wind blows there, and no wave moves. Yet there are frozen or motionless waves risen up there in their crests and furrows, and these unmoving waves have a deep meaning.

“The sun and the moon do not shine on the spot, and the stars do not. No birds fly over and no fish swim under. There is no luminescence in the depths there, and no gegenschein in the high air. Compass needles wilt and sag for there is no magnetism. In the area of the spot there is no dry land except, it is said, at the changing of the aeons. No planes fly over, for it would be all blind flight. No ships or boats traverse that shadow, for it is not on the way to anywhere. It is on no way, no route, no current, no wind. Nothing drifts in or out of the region ordinarily, though there is strong rumor that our own island drifts into it now. It is the blind spot on the globe where map-makers often put in notes or scales or explanations of Mercator’s projection. So you can see that there is really nothing noteworthy about the spot. Except one thing.”

Drill shook a bit of sharkskin pepper onto the back of his hand, and he licked it off with his long and perhaps prehensile tongue. There is no real pepper on Rapa Nui; but grated sharkskin looks like pepper, and it is much cheaper if one grates it himself.

“What is the one thing?” I asked, as was expected of me.

“The furrows and crests of the frozen or motionless waves, they have a design; perhaps it is the original of all designs,” Drill said. “As the spot is the shadow of the thumb of God, so these undulative configurations are the shadows of the whorls and loops of God’s own thumbprint. Those designs have all been recorded, and they are in the old archives and chants. You can see the value of this.”

“No. What is the value?” I asked.



“Why, we have positive identification,” Drill said. “If ever a false God should come over our earth, we would know the difference.”

“The spot is moving over our land now,” said Choi, who was Drill’s sweep-out boy. There was something about Choi that was too clean, too ordered, too sleek, too suave, too cruel, too efficient. His abilities were plainly beyond those of an ordinary sweep-out boy. “And the land becomes furrowed as the spot moves over it. The furrowing of the land takes the game patterns as that which the motionless waves had shown. And something else is revealed by the furrowing, is literally uncovered by the furrowing — it is the resurrection of the implicit stones.”

“What stones are these?” I asked Choi.

“The basalt stones that were implicit in the Earth from the beginning,” Choi said. “The stones that will become the idols of the now masters when they are hewed and carried and set up in place by the terrifying, soul-wringing labor of someone, not of ourselves.”

How would there be basalt stones on Rapa Nui? How would a sweep-out boy on Rapa Nui use words like “implicit?”

There was the sound of some sort of scuffle outside of Drill’s Marine Bar. There were the — now somewhat troubled — two sets of footfalls in the outer corridor: those of a splayfooted person in soft buckskin boots and also the blurred double footfalls of a barefoot person. And I heard the angry voice of Hamadryad: “You will wait, beast! You will not take over one instant before the time!” Hamadryad howled. There was a chilling animal chortle — it was insane, and it echoed the terrible, ordered mind-set of the insane. There was a thudding, ripping blow. And there was a quavering scream — Hamadryad’s. I felt with an awful sinking that Hamadryad was dead. But presently he came into the Marine Bar. He was somewhat bloodied about the left shoulder and arm, but he was almost serene.

“It is a mistake to treat slaves with too light a hand”, he howled softly, “but it is likewise a mistake not to recognize the day when it arrives. I’ll not intrude my own troubles on others though, especially since the turn-over will be pretty general. Ah, a Final Catastrophe, Mr. Drill, and the usual for lunch.”

“Certainly, Mr. Hamadryad,” Drill said, and he began to assemble the Final Catastrophe. A Final Catastrophe is green, still-fermenting palm wine served in a large wooden bowl. It is sprinkled with sharkskin pepper

and it has hull-bore worms in it to give it liveliness. It always contains a cormorant egg smashed in its shell and afloat in the liquid. The Final Catastrophe is a specialty of Drill's Marine Bar and is found almost nowhere also in the world.

"We overdramatize ourselves and our affairs," Hamadryad howled easily as the sweep-out boy Choi, a little later, was cauterizing his bleeding arm and shoulder with boiling hot ships' tar, using a big brush. Choi had a new glitter and avidity for this task. He sniffed blood; he sniffed pain. One was tempted to believe that there was a touch of cruelty involved, tempted to suspect that the tar didn't really have to be that hot.

"Actually, a final catastrophe is not as final as all that," Hamadryad added. "We eschatological persons are accused of turning all our tales into end-of-the-world tales. Really they are not. They are merely end-of-the-era tales, or end-of-the-episode tales."

Was it in mere sympathy with Hamadryad that my own left shoulder began to ache and stir and heave? A great pain there had roots running down into my heart and lungs and liver and up into my head. Something was very wrong about this new pain in my shoulder, this new weirdness, this new desolation. A shoulder should not go to the roots of being like that. And there was something very wrong with the behavior of our island. It gave a great bump and jolt so as to produce sudden seasickness and disorientation. The island must have moved fifteen feet further into that blind spot that is the shadow of God's thumb.

Hamadryad shook kunai-grass seeds into the Final Catastrophe as seen is that drink was set in front of him. Kunai seeds are very like Aladdin's Sesame, very like broomcorn spikes. Hamadryad paid for the drink with a nui d'argile, a local clay coin of which five hundred are required to equal one Chilean peso. It was really not enough for the drink, but Drill was some sort of Kindred of Hamadryad — and one always enters a great turnover broke and in debt.

"Our remnant island, our vestigial home comes under the shade almost at once," Hamadryad said. "All the islands of the world — all the mains also — are only pieces broken off and drifting away from the paradise. Yet this our own island was once special among the bright ones."

Chui the sweep-out boy had begun to tear my shirt off me in strips and rippings. This wasn't ordinary behavior even in Drill's Marine Bar,

but I was now in too much pain to object. It was as if a sword were going out of my shoulder, and that hurt much more going out than going in. Then, with great delight, Chui was applying boiling hot tar to my disturbed area.

“They love it,” this Choi reveled. “It’s a joyful malediction to them on their going out to take control. The tar brush is symbol of all such things.”

“All what such things?” I asked with irritation. My shoulder was on fire, but there was something involved with my shoulder that was enjoying the fire.

The island give another lurch. Still more of it had come under the somber shadow.

“The scatter-heads, those incontinent dreamers who believe that there is an Astrology, say that the world has been in the age of Pisces,” Hainadryad stated, “and that now it will, or has already, entered into the age of Aquarius. What bubble-headed fools they are! They know neither the constellations in heaven nor the constellations on earth! The world has been, for the last long era, in the glorious age of the Monkey; and now it will — Oh, why must such things be! — enter the tyrannical and meticulous age of the Cat.” Hamadryad snuflred, and a tear ran down his long nose.

Drill brought Hamadrynd’s lunch, the stomach of suckling pig distended with its first milk. Hamadryad sprinkled it with sharkskin pepper and also with kunai seed, spilling much of both from his shaking hand. Then he dined. “— my last meal as a free person,” he yowled softly.

Myself, I had that disturbed and bottomless feeling that sometimes accompanies typhoid fever, the feeling that there were two of me — one standing just a little apart from the other. But how should I suddenly have the typhoid? Or was the typhoid itself a mere fragmented premonition of something to come? (Ah, the island gave another jolt and slid still more into the shadow; soon it would be darkness at mid-morning.) Was the typhoid — it might be a collective name for many phenomena — a premonition of a thing that might be in the process of arriving at this very moment?

“All of your theories are cataclysmic, as are the happenings and appearances of this day in this place,” I said, “but how are they relevant to the more substantial world in its more reasonable daylight?”

“Is it not shockingly relevant that the Monkeys are out and the Cats are in?” Hamadryad asked sorrowfully. “You will now have over all the world the careful, stalking cruelty and the tufted-eared deceit.”

“Is that worse than what we have had?” I asked him. He had now become very nervous.

“Abysmally worse,” he croaked. Hamadryad hadn’t a good appetite for his last meal as a free person. Painfully, agonizingly, he was moving little flecks of sharkskin pepper and kunai seed about on the table, moving them with mental anguish but not touching them except with his mind. “Oh, I’ll never be able to do it,” Hamadryad whimpered. “How then will I be able to move things a billion billion times heavier? Oh, it will be an agony of the spirit to perform such labor, and the doom is for such a long aeon!”

I myself was feeling as torn-up as ever I had in my life. The spooky duality was still on me. I was suffering a sundering identity crisis. There was one me located approximately in my proper body. There was another me situated somewhere behind my left shoulder. Which one was valid was unsettled. Everything in my minds was unsettled for a puzzling while. And the island on which we were staying had now developed the nervous, choppy movements of a small boat caught in a rip tide.

“What is it that those in the ascendant have and that the slaves usually lack?” Hamadryad asked in a tired, analytical howl. “It is presence,” he stated.

“Presence?” I asked. “I thought that presence was the one thing that the poorest and most abject slave shared with the rich and mighty. Everyone is present somewhere.”

“No, they are not,” Hamadryad maintained. “Many species and races seldom show real presence. Your own shoulder-slaves do not. My own slave in the corridor —” Hamadryad shuddered a bit here “— does not. Presence is an attribute of a complete being. Many have not been complete. Now we enter a region and an era when perhaps many of us will regress to incomplete beings. It’s frustrating to be incomplete.”

“And invisible?” I asked.

“And invisible,” he said. “It’s a sad state. Many who have not experienced it do not realize that to be invisible is to be in total darkness both objectively and subjectively. In our new, sad state, we will be seen only in our work, in the hewing and transporting and setting, in the

homage and ransom.”

“What will we hew and transport and set?” I asked Hamadryad. “And to whom will we pay homage and ransom?”

“The great cool cats and the huge idols of them,” he said fearfully. “We will be compelled — awl, awl, rawl, rawl, howl!” and Hamadryad was seized by terrible pain and transformation.

A presence came into the room. And an absence gathered itself whimpering together. Mr. Caracal was the presence that arrived in the room. He was no longer an invisible slave in the corridor; he was a person present — felix and feline — a person of whom great idols would be raised out of the implicit stones. And Mr. Hamadryad was the gathering absence.

And I felt that I also had gathered myself into a weak absence and that that absence was slinking out of my body to skulk and slave invisibly somewhere — and I wasn’t much good at moving heavy objects by mental anguish. Oh, the torture that might be ahead! But at the same time I had become a person of great strength and vitality, and I was about to take over and infuse a body that I found tottering there, an old body of my own.

Hamadryad was now no more than a long-nosed shadow in boots that were not part of him. Then he moved out of his fancy boots, and he had baboon feet. He had stopped out of an old sign of his freedom. He was now a freebooter no longer, but a slave slipping into invisibility.

Odd that I had not noticed before that Hamadryad was a baboon. But he was a baboon, a drill, a man-drill — and a vanishing one. Odd that I had not before noticed that the long-faced statues here an Easter Island were baboon-faced. And that thousands of great-faced carvings elsewhere in the world were baboon-faced. But the baboon is much more manlike in face than are the other monkeys, and the monkeys much more so than any other creatures. And, while the monkey era had still obtained, men and monkeys were pretty much interchangeable.

Something of myself had gone out of my body and now whimpered invisible at my shoulder. But something of a more real me had come in with great strength and poise. Mr. Caracal winked at me. Mr. Chui winked at me, and he was much more than a sweep-out boy now. But Drill had disappeared to be an invisible slave for a long era.

Now I am clear and clean, and cool and cruel. I am in command of

myself and of my own sector of the world. I am a cool cat with no more of the monkey resemblance. The statues to be raised by slaves from the implicit stones will resemble me. We have high-handed hatred for our right now, We have so many of such spacious things for our right now.

Have you noticed how much calmer the world is now that we have instituted certain measures of discipline? Have you noticed how much cleaner the world is now that we have made “cruelty” no longer a dirty word? Surely I and mine had once been scatter-brained, petty, inefficient and human. Is there not something intolerably monkeylike in the word human? That is all past. Now I am divinely mad, but cool and cruel in my disposition; no longer scatterbrained; all my brains now are neatly in one brain-pan.

Once I traveled in coconuts. In the old way of it, that was to be a monkey traveling in monkey-nuts. The coconut complex — was it not Adam Smith who wrote it so? — had been the last refuge of free enterprise in the world.

Fortunately we have broken up that refuge. We have organized coconuts, the last of the monkey-business. We have organized coconuts into the World-Wide New Era Great Cat Coconut Cartel.

Holy cats, we have organized it all!

## THE MAN WITH THE AURA

“Nor is that the worst of my troubles, James,” said Thomas Castlereagh. “Not only has my conscience begun to gnaw me, but my doctor tells me that I will be dead within a month.”

“Good God, Thomas! I thought you were in perfect health,” his friend James Madigan cried out in real alarm.

“Not perfect, but, James, I’m of sound body for a man of my age.”

“But your doctor said —”

“That he intends to kill me. I’ve given him reason.”

That was the evening that Thomas Castlereagh told his full story to James Madigan. Halfheartedly he had tried to tell it several times before. He hadn’t been believed. He had gained the reputation of being a delightful man with a certain outre humor.

He wasn’t. He had no humor at all.

But he had everything else: robust pink-faced health; gold-edged security and impregnable wealth; familial abundance in his later years as recompense for his earlier sorrows; and the glowing regard of every person in America.

Castlereagh served on many committees and national forums. His heading-up of any body guaranteed its integrity and success. No president felt properly inaugurated unless Castlereagh stood by his side. His was the most sought-after endorsement in the country. He was Respectability.

Any description of the man would be trite beside the man himself. His face had become the Face of America at its best.

Rumley had done him. Cassell had done him in the magnificent portrait now in the Great Portraits Room of the Tate Gallery. Arestino had done him. But the finest portraits could give no real indication of the man himself. Anyone in his presence was always pleasantly shaken by the experience. Words cannot give an account of it, though the Castlereagh voice and words were a large part of the effect.

Castlereagh’s three sons were respected and notable. Charles had much of the father’s business ability and of his pervading charisma. John Thomas was a doctorate professor, and the author of an exciting text, *Theoretical Extrapolated Mechanics*. Robert Adrian was a gifted artist. All inherited in part from the father’s amazing gifts, but all would stand in

his shadow forever.

And Castlereagh's wife was Letitia, an international beauty known equally for her wit and sparkle and for her nearly too perfect beauty.

And the graciousness and grace of the man failed in nothing. He had brought a new dimension to goodness. He was perfected in fame and fortune; and perfection is not perfect if it ever falls in anything.

Castlereagh's visitor of this night was James Madigan, a Cabinet Member, Secretary of Crime Prevention. But Madigan was in a bleak mood, even in the golden presence of Castlereagh.

"Thomas, the country, the society, is in the worst shape ever," he deplored. "The very idea of honesty has become comical. We have been afraid to publish the revised crime index for the last six months; I doubt if we will ever publish it again; it's horrible. The very appearance of character has all but vanished from the human face. Perhaps that is why you yourself are so remarkable, Thomas."

"Coals of fire, James! But they don't burn me much. I'm well insulated."

"What, Thomas? I believe that I catch a glint of your fine humor there, and I certainly need it tonight. How the crimes do weigh on me!"

"Ah, the crimes!" said Castlereagh. "Murder and arson aren't important in themselves. The effect on a man becomes serious only when followed by a certain hardening. But a man who has done these things to the point of ennui and who has

built upon them may eventually become a little coarse. I've seen it happen to others. Who can say that I am immune? Drink, James."

They were drinking brandy together. The words of Castlereagh seemed delightfully humorous. It was the puckish twist of the mouth, it was the laughing eyebrows, it was the dancing gray of the eyes, the complexity of the voice.

"I enjoy your piquant humor, Thomas," said Madigan as he savored and sipped the drink that had an aura beyond all others. "There is something beyond hilarity in the idea that you could ever be criminal, or coarse. But even your drollery can hardly distract me tonight. When I was younger I believed that there was nothing darker than a crime of sheer passion. Now I know that there is something much worse. Do you know what it is?"

"I know it as well as I know the face behind my face, James. But it is



you who are in full eloquence. Go on.”

“It is the crime without passion, Thomas, the crime almost without interest. The most vile things are done daily in the most offhand manner. It is a thing colder and more horrifying than sadism. If only I could discover the roots of it! If I could find one clear stripped-down example to study. Thomas, I might develop a specific against this venom.”

“I can give you one, Madigan. I will give you a chance to study at close range a man who has had more opportunities for evil and has made more use for them than anyone in the world. Listen, and believe. It is important to me that someone finally believe.

“Madigan, I am about to tell you the story of my life. I realize that those are the most fearsome words that one man can ever say to another, but do not be alarmed; I have the virtue of brevity.

“I was named Tom Shanty, James, and not Thomas Castlereagh. I’ve come a ways from the shanty to the roal castle which is the meaning of Castlereagh. The name, you see, James, is one element of the aura. I was a sickly boy and the most luckless ever; and perhaps the most dishonest. The police suspected me of every misdemeanor in our neighborhood, and they were right to suspect me. My appearance was against me. I was a fox-faced sneak.”

“You, Thomas? Mr. Distinction himself? This is good. On with your tale.”

“I was fox-smart and fox-mean. But a fox is hunted uncommonly, James, before he learns his trade. I was unsuccessful in all my jobs and all my thieveries, and was always poor. I worked for a dishonest photographic portraitist. We collected for these, but we did not deliver them. The samples I showed always made the sale. And this means experience was the begining of my success. The touchups really were fabulous. My employer was a genius at this — when he chose to work at it. I myself am now a compendium of his best touchups. I learned what the face of respectability and distinction looked like.

“I worked for a dishonest electronics man. We did bad work for high prices on TV, VVV, and Replica sets. Being fox-smart I picked up technical knowledge. I learned what things may be translated into waves, including things not commonly thought to be translated.

“I worked for con men. I was bad at this, and my masters were good. I

understood quickly why this was so. They had natural advantages for it, and I did not. I had decided to create these advantages for myself unnaturally. More brandy, James?”

“Thank you. It’s a droll old brandy you serve, and a droller tale you serve up. Go on, Thomas.”

“I spent time in the pokey. My face and my aspect were always against me. They drew the finger of suspicion correctly to me everytime. Then I became that lowest life-form, an unsuccessful inventor.

“I married a quiet and rather short-witted girl who was quietly repelled by me. My luick worsened. There came the day when there was no prospect of any job, honest or dishonest; and there was nothing to eat in the house. Little Fox-face had come to the bottom of his burrow.

“But on that lowest day I had completed a crude model of my oddest invention. I named it the aura machine.”

“An odd name, Thomas. And you sold the invention and began your rise?” Madigan asked.

“I didn’t sell it. I never did sell it, for it’s priceless. It’s made me quite rich. I installed it and let it work for me.”

“Just what did you do with your invention, Thomas?”

“Oh, when my device seemed to be working all right, I went out and forged five large checks in the crudest possible manner. That was the first test of my invention, and it stood up well.”

“Thomas,” smiled James Madigan, “I feel better already. There is something in your goblin humor that always sets me up.”

“With the funds acquired from the forged checks I took out twenty thousand dollars’ insurance on my wife,” Castlereagh said. “I waited three days for the papers to clear. Then I killed her.”

“You are the most amazing man, Castlereagh,” Madigan said. “You are the cathartic I need. No man but you, even in the retrospect of forty years, could jest about such a matter without crudity. But coming from you, it is the all-saving humor.”

“I have no humor, Madigan.”

“I’ve studied that early case, Thomas. I’m as baffled by it as you are. There was no clue at all to the murder of your your wife, and no suspect. You and she were alone in the house and nobody could have entered. It remains one of the classic puzzles to this day.”

“It puzzled me a little too, James, until I looked in the mirror again.

My device was working remarkably. My face no longer resembled that of a fox-faced sneak. It was my same face, and yet how different! My luck had changed, had been changed by a fairly simple device. The tide has been running for me ever since.”

“But later, Thomas, you suffered great disasters that would have sank a lesser man.”

“All the disasters suffered were tricks of my own, and all turned me a profit. With the funds from my wife’s death I started a business. It was a crackpot business and it should have failed, for I was and am incompetent. But I had my new contrived luck that made competence unnecessary.”

“Thomas, you pile drollery upon drollery. You’re a bright patch in my life.”

“My invention was working well for me. No, James, the business was in no way concerned with its manufacture or sale. By a series of clumsy frauds I prospered. It was a proud milestone in my life when I caused my first suicide, one of many I was to cause.”

“Humor is the key, Thomas. Let our bleakest moods be bathed in its golden light and somehow we will find the strength to go on. The tale becomes richer and richer.”

“Then I embarked on arson, that most harebrained and easily detected of frauds, on a large scale. I acquired a block-long warehouse, an ancient shanty of a building, and filled it with old crates and trash. I insured it heavily. I had twenty drums of kerosene openly bottled in one night and strategically placed. And after dark I upturned them all, gave them a quarter of an hour to soak the timber, and walked out the front door. James, that was the crudest piece of arson ever pulled, and it was not even suspected. My invention was working fine for me now. I collected. I had made my first million dollars; and the story went out that I had suffered the loss of five times that amount.”

“Castlereagh, you are better than this old brandy. You warm my cockles and give new life to my tired heart. Your ‘invention’ I know will be a wowser when you come to your punch line. No tongue but yours could twist out so delightful a rhapsody.”

“It is my invention again that makes you find the story delightful. When I look at my reflection, James, I am even able to hoodwink myself. The man behind such a face as mine cannot be other than a great and

respected man.”

“Richer and richer,” chuckled Madigan.

“I married again,” said Castlereagh. “Hers was not really a great fortune, but it was a comfortable seven-figure accumulation. I saw it comfortably settled on myself. I gave her half a year, for she was a pleasurable creature. Then I killed her.”

“Ah, you hide that old tragedy behind your mocking humor also, Thomas. I am familiar with the case. It was one of the most baffling —”

“Sure. No clue at all, and no suspect. I was alone in the house with her, and nobody could have entered. There were no fingerprints but mine to be found anywhere, even in the powder on her throat. She was throttled by persons unknown. Quite an impossible murder.

“Well, James, I stayed with proved methods, but always on an expanding scale. Who Would suspect a man whose face mirrored the integrity of Lincoln, the clear fire of a young Jefferson, the humor of Lamb, the honest thoughtfulness of Browne, the scope of Plutarch, the urchin-humanness of Francis, the serenity-in-power of Octavius? My next arson concerned eighty acres of surplus government buildings acquired for a sour song and a sweet face. It took me thirteen days and three thousand drums of kerosene to set that one up properly. But I collected fifty million dollars worth of insurance on it. It was bruited about, however, that I had lost half a billion; and the nation almost went into mourning.”

“I will remember my personal desolation at your great loss,” said Madigan. “I doubt if any other man would have had the heart to surmount it, or the grace to joke about it later on.”

“One more grand trick, and then I’d have all the money that mattered. I built me a nationwide all-embracing fraud. I cleaned thirty million investors, small, medium, and large on that one. Then, as an experiment, I let my mask slip a trifle, muted my peculiar device a little. A few of the fish saw behind it then. They even took me through a series of courts.”

“I well remember those craven character assassins, Castlereagh,” Madigan said. “No man but yourself would be able to find humor in it, even now.”

“Oh, they had me cold at every turn, James. The transparency of my fraudulent machinations was breathtaking. But I turned my device on to the full. My invention, ah, luck, working again at full efficiency. And once

more I had my wonderful face. It had gone so far that it had to go all the way, and of course I won. There were tears in the eyes of the Chief Justice when he embraced me after it was all over. I had tears in my own eyes, but I would not want to have the salt in them publicly analyzed.”

“The entire nation wept in gratitude at your vindication; and now you are able to joke absurdly about it. Ah, deep humor and tears are very close together, are they not, Thomas?”

“Jerked by the same pair of strings, James. Then I put the cap on it. I set up the Castlereagh Fund for the Study of Bott’s Disease.”

“Kicked off by an anonymous contribution of thirty million dollars! Anonymous! But, of course, everyone knew that the contribution was yours.”

“Sure, everyone knew it was mine, even if it wasn’t. It was my own publicity that pointed the big finger at me. But it wasn’t mine. The man who gave that thirty million was rather a shy fish about giving. He gave in the dark through me, By an irony, his name has come to be a byword for miserliness. By a double irony it was myself who hung that tag on him. But I treat that fund with respect; I only milk it for the earned interest every year. I call it my toothpick fund. If anything named Bott’s disease really comes around, maybe I’ll be able to run the trick through again.”

“Thomas, what a fund of deep drollery you have! My fit of depression is all but gone. But seriously, Castlereagh, what is this business about Doctor Forester? He must be unbalanced. You mean he has actually threatened you?”

“Forester has done a little work in emanations himself. I went to him for a skin rash, and he discovered parts of my device embedded under my hide. He caught on pretty fast. He learned that my projected personality was an artificial one. He learned a few other things as soon as he started thinking. Now he says he’s going to kill me. I’ve been fooling around with his wife pretty seriously, you know.”

“You and Maisie? Oh, that is the joke of all jokes. For a moment I thought that you were serious.”

“I am. Madigan, if a man says he will kill me, then that man is already dead. If I have any talent at all it is for anticipating an event. The murder of Doctor Forester in this present month will be a curious one, and it will reach to the level of your own office; but you will not be there for it. It will be a crude one. I always kill crudely. James, I talk and talk, but you have

no ears for what I say.”

“No ears for your humor, Castlereagh? I haven’t enjoyed anything so much in months. I am rejuvenated and recharged. Thomas, come to the high point of it! What is your ‘Wonderful Invention’?”

“Wait, James, I must make a phone call. And then I must mix for you a special brandy.” And Thomas Castlereagh went to do so. He returned after a short interval. He gave Madigan the brandy.

“And what did you add to my brandy to make it special, Thomas?” Madigan asked.

“Oh, the oldest venom of all, conium maculatum. It goes well with all wines and brandies. Strikes direct to the heart. Taste it and thank me for it.”

“I taste it I thank you for it,” said Madigan.

“Thank me that I have spared you the burned almond taste, at least. I hate such cliches in poisonings. Ah, the marvelous invention? It is simply the Aura Machine. I was fooling around with electronics which I luckily misunderstood. And I was studying bodily emanations and auras as the expression of personality. I stumbled on a way of modifying my own aura.

“I found that the aura, and its great effect upon the ambient, were really very simple things that might be simply reproduced. Those who speak of personal magnetism are correct. There is a strong magnetic element; also a strong element of the electrical corona effect; and there is another emanation that works on the subliminal sense of smell. Quite simply, I could make my own aura! I could make it to project any personality and appearance that I wished for myself... I made to project the personality and appearance of Respectability, Distinction, and Utter Rectitude. I fabricated such an artificial personality for myself that nobody, under any conditions but the most fantastic, would ever be able to believe any evil of me.

“Could such a simple thing work, James? It could. A duck call is a simple device, and a duck is a complex one. Yet a duck will be fooled by a duck-call sounded by a man. A duck will even come to the artificial call in preference to the real, if the artificial is made with sufficient care. I employed all the art I was capable of in making my own device; and mostly it has sufficed.

“It didn’t take much: a subcutaneous device which I inserted myself; a

selenium plate set into my head by a quack butcher; an apparatus embedded in my throat to give my voice what I wanted; a power pack; a harmonic booster. I tried it on my lowest day, as I have told you, and it worked. At first I was a little afraid of overdoing it. Then I discovered that there is no way of overdoing the respectability bit. People saw my face, not as it was, but as a respectable one. I became the man who could do no wrong. It was a grand trick, and I worked it down to the nub.”

“Thomas, you slay me!”

“True. You finally understand. No, you do not. We both forget that I have no humor. Madigan, my device was so good that it could even fool an ordinary camera. However, I devised a camera with an astatic filter that cuts the emanating aura. It’s good for a man to remember sometimes what he really looks like. I still have the face of a fox-faced sneak.”

Madigan’s chuckle had become like an earth-wave. “It’s like something out of those odd little magazines with the surrealistic covers, Thomas. Have you ensured that your — as — marvelous invention will not die with you?”

“Sure. I’ve willed the secret to a small group of cutthroats sometimes in my employ. Their looks are against them. They remind me of me. They need it. And when I am gone, they will carry on the evil work that is so close to my heart.”

“What a wonderful man you are,” said James Madigan. “From what deep well do you draw your flowing humor. Thomas, I feel giddy! I’m suddenly ill. Call my man for me. I may not be able to get home alone.”

“I did call your man, James, just before I poisoned you, and told him that you were dying. He’ll be here shortly. I had to tell my story to someone, and I could not let that someone live if he believed it. And after all, who will suspect me of poisoning you, just because we were drinking together with no one else present when you were given the needled brandy? My thing will hold. It will be another of those most baffling crimes ever.”

“Ah, your wonderful humor, Thomas! But I am quite sick.”

“Dying, I tell you. Dammit, man, can’t you get it through your head that you’re dying before you die? I want you to believe me! It’s less fun when you don’t believe me. James, I kill you! Act like a man being killed!”

“You are such a wonderful man, Castlereagh. If I am somehow called

away, and it seems that I am, I'll miss you woefully."

"Believe me that I kill you, Madigan! It's no fun if you don't believe."

But James Madigan died with a blissful smile, happy in the presence of his golden-hearted friend. It was enough in life to have known him.

"I had better take the other one tonight also, and have it done," Thomas told himself. The fox-face flickered there for a brief instant, as it sometimes did when he was alone. "And then I'll turn it up as far as it will go, and damn the headaches. This one will take everything I've got."

These were two of the most mysterious murders ever. The poisoning of Madigan was clearly murder; and the bloody bludgeoning of Doctor Forester could have been nothing else. And yet they seemed impossible of solution. There was no clue. No nothing.

The drink of Madigan had been poisoned, that of Castlereagh had not been. And yet they had been together for the long evening, and no one had intruded. And the affair of Doctor Forester was truly weird. Thomas Castlereagh, taken by a strong premonition, had gone to the home of his close friend the doctor and been admitted. Something happened then, a thing so shocking that Castlereagh does not retain the memory of it. From his attempt to intervene, apparently, he was covered with the doctor's death blood, and he held the death weapon in his own august hands. Whatever fell intruder did the thing remains a mystery.

These foul murders cry to Heaven for vengeance, but we of Earth are baffled when we try to answer that cry. All is riddle.

A certain commentator best encapsuled the feelings of us:

"The sympathy of the nation and the whole world goes to Thomas Castlereagh. So great and good a man, and he suffered such sorrows in the past! And now to be deprived of his two closest friends in a single night! The heart groans."



## AND NAME MY NAME

### 1.

It was said our talk was gone or rare  
And things with us were ill,  
But we're seven apes from anywhere  
A-walking up a hill.

They came to those Kurdish highlands by ways that surely were not the best in the world. They came with a touch of furtiveness. It was almost as if they wished to come invisibly. It had been that way the other times also, with the other groups.

There were seven creatures in most of the groups coming, and there were seven in this group: two from the Indies, two from Greater Africa, two from Small Africa (sometimes called Europe), one from Little Asia. There was no rule about this but there was always variety in the groups.

"I never believed that the last one was truly valid," said Joe Sunrise. He was the one from Little Asia: he was big and brindled. "Yes, I still regard the last one as an interloper. On, he did show greater power than ourselves. He set us back into a certain place, and since that time we don't talk very much or very well. We don't do any of the things as well as we did before. I suppose he is master of us, for a little while, and in a skimpy way. I believe though that that 'little while' is finished today. I believe that he will be shown as no more than a sad aberration of ourselves, as a step backwards or at least sideways.

"But it will be a true stage of the sequence today, as it was in our own primary day, is it was when we named the world and all its fauna, when we set it into its hierarchy."

"It comes to us from the old grapevine," said Mary Rainwood, the blondish or redish female from the Indies, "that the Day of the Whales was a big one. For showiness it topped even our own takeover. The account of it is carved in rocks in whale talk, in rocks that are over a mile deep under a distant ocean; it is an account that no more than seven whales can still read. But there are several giant squids who can read it also, and squids are notoriously loose-mouthed. Things like that are told around.

“There are others that stand out in the old memories, though they may not have happened quite as remembered. And then there were the less memorable ones: the Day of the Hyenas, for instance; or that of the present ruler (so like and yet so unlike ourselves) whose term is ending now. I for one am glad to see this one end.”

“There is an air of elegance about the New One,” said Kingman Savanna, the male delegate from Greater Africa. “He also is said, in a different sense from the one who now topples from the summit, to be both very like and very unlike ourselves. The New One hasn’t been seen yet, but one of real elegance will be foreknown. Ah, but we were also elegant in our own short time! So, I am told, were the Elephants. There was also something special about the Day of the Dolphins. But about this passing interloper there has not been much special.”

“What is this new event and coming blocks us out still more?” Linger Quick-One asked in worry. “What if it leaves us with still less speech and art. What can we do about our own diminishment?”

“We can grin a little,” Joe Sunrise said with a certain defiance. “We can gnash our teeth. We can console ourselves with the thought that he will be diminished still more.”

“He? Who?” Kingman asked.

“The Interloper: he under whom we have lived for this latter twisted and foreshortened era. The Days of the Interlopers are always short-lived, and when their day is finished they tend to lose their distinction and to merge with the lords of the day before. “

“They with us? Ugh!” Mary Rainwood voiced it.

There were seven persons or creatures going in this band, and Joe Sunrise of Little Asia seemed to be the accepted leader. They walked slowly but steadily, seeming to be in some pain, as if they were not used to wearing shoes or robes. But they were well shod and well wrapped; they were wrapped entirely in white or gray robes such as the desert people wore, such as fewer of the highland people wore. They were fooled, they were girt, they bore packs and bundles. They were as if handless within their great gray gloves: they were almost faceless within their hoods and wrappings.

But two things could not be hidden if one peered closely at them: the large, brown, alert, observing eyes (these eyes had been passively observing now for ten thousand generations); and their total hairiness

wherever the least bit of face or form gave itself away.

Well, they had a place to go and they were going there, but they had a great uneasiness about it all. These seven, by the way, out of all the members of their several species remaining on Earth, still retained speech and the abstracting thought that goes with it. And on what dark day had these gifts been lost by all the rest of their closest kindred?

And such was the case with almost all of the so different groups moving towards the meeting place. Such was the case with the elands and the antelopes, with the hogs and the liippos, with the asses and the zebras, with the eagles and the cranes, with the alligators and the gavials, with the dolphins and with the sharks. They were small elites representing large multitudes, and they retained certain attributes of elites that the multitudes had lost.

## 2.

Came Polar Bears on bergs past Crete,  
And Mammoths seen by Man,  
And Crocodiles on tortured feet,  
And Whales in Kurdistan.

There had been all through the Near East, and then through the World, a general hilarity and an air of hoax about the reports of the 'Invisible Animals.' There were of course the Bears that walked and talked like men and were reported as coming out of the Russias. One of these bears, so the joke went, entered a barroom in Istanbul. The bear was nattily dressed, smoked a cigar, laid a hundred lira note on the bar and ordered a rum and cola.

The bar-man didn't know what to do so he went back to the office and asked the boss.

"Serve the bear," the boss said, "only don't give him his ninety lira change. Give him ten lira only. We will make prodigies pay for being prodigies. "

The bar-man went and did this, and the bear drank his drink in silence.

"We don't get many bears in here," the barman finally said when the silence had gotten on his nerves.

"At ninety lira a throw I can understand why you don't," the bear said.

There were hundreds of these talking-animal jokes in those day. But they had a quality different from most jokes: they were all true exactly as told.

Then there were the invisible African Elephants (how can an African Elephant possibly be invisible in clear day light and open landscape?) coming up across the Sinai wastelands and going on for a great distance across the Syrian Desert. They were seven very large African Elephants and they spoke courteously to all who stood and gaped as they passed. They were the only African Elephants in the World with the gift of speech; the others had lost it long ago. No one would admit seeing these out-of-place Elephants, of course. That would be the same as one admitting that he was crazy.

There were the great Crocodiles traveling in labor and pain over the

long dry places. There were the Zebras and Giraffes snuffling along out of Greater Africa, and the blackmaned and the tawney-maned lions. There were the Ostriches and the Cape Buffalo and the huge Boa Snakes (the Day of the Snakes had been a very long time ago). There were not large groups of any of these, five or seven, or sometimes nine. All were rather superior individuals of their species: all had the gift of speech and reason. All had a certain rakishness and wry humor in their mien, and yet all went under that curious compulsion that is the younger brother of fear.

No person would admit seeing any of these 'Invisible Animals,' but many persons told, with a peculiar nervousness, of other persons claiming to have seen them. There was somebody telling of somebody seeing a band of Irish Elk: no matter that the species was supposedly extinct for several hundred years; reportorial jokers would never be extinct. And it is true that these very few Elk said that they were the very last of their species.

Many persons were said to have seen two floating islands going past Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean. One of these floating islands was loaded with various animals from South America; the other was filled and painfully crowded with sundry animals from the North American continent. At least half of these animals had been believed to be extinct. Some of them, must have kept themselves well-hidden for centuries to be able to appear now even as 'Invisible Animals.'

But even odder things were coming across the plains of India and Iran. They were hopping and leaping animals. Actually their motion, when they were in full speed, was like that of the hind quarters of a galloping horse, a horse that had no forequarters. There were the big Kangaroos and the smaller Wallabies and such. But what were they doing? With them were many other creatures from Australia and New Zealand and Tasmania and the Impossible Islands.

Ah well, then what about the Polar Bears riding on a small ice-berg that floated past Crete and on towards Little Asia? There were Seals riding on this also, and Sea Lions were sporting in the lee of it. Oddest of all, there was a light but continuous snowstorm over this berg only and the circle of graying frothing water around it, and over no other place.

But Whales in the Kurdish Highlands? What? What? Yes, the rivers had been very high that year. They had cut out new channels here and there and left parts of their old channels in the form of a series of lakes.

But Whales in the Highlands! It's true that nobody told about it without winking. And yet it was told about.

And how's about the Angel out of Heaven who walked and stood in those high plains and who seemed to be in some sort of pleasant trouble? It's true that he said that he was not an Angel. He said that he was a Man only and was named Man. It is true that he looked like a Man and not an Angel (nobody knowing what an angel looked like). He looked like a Man, a Man of a very superior sort. But even this is a presumptive statement, since no one had admitted seeing him at all personally.

Even so, Whales in the Highlands, and a new special Man named Man! And a thousand other prodigies. Could it all be the report of jokers?

### 3.

To us, the bright, the magic set,  
The World is but -a crumb.  
If we be not the People yet,  
When will the people come?

But there were seven other very special humans met together in that same part of the world; met together, perhaps, by a sort of contrived accident. Nobody could deny that they were human; and yet one of the things they were discussing was the report that their humanity might be denied that very day or the following day.

They had met in a private club room of the International Hotel in Mosul. They were making ready for a journey beyond Mosul. Which way beyond Mosul? Well, that was the thing they were discussing with some puzzlement on their own part. It would not be North or South or East or West or Up or Down from Mosul. It would just be beyond, a little bit beyond Mosul Town.

The seven special humans were Anatole Keshish, a Turkish-Greek-Armenian intellectual of easy urbanity; Helen Rubric, the great lady and puzzle forever; Toy Tonk, an Eurasian girl who constructed philosophies that were like flower arrangements; Hatari Nahub, that charismatic Negro man who transcended continents and cultures; Lisa Baron of the light-haired and light-eyed peoples, and she was light-minded and light-tongued beyond the others; Charley Mikakeh, who was six kinds of American Indian, with a few touches of French, Irish, dark Dutch, and Jewishness in him; Jorge Segundo, who was all the Latins in the world in one man but in whom the old Roman predominated (there was once a wise man who said that we tended to forget that the old Romans were Italians, to believe that they were Englishmen, but they weren't).

These seven had brilliance dripping off them like liquid jewels, an image which we cannot express rightly in words, not even their own fragmentary words.

How these seven had been selected for a mission that they understood hardly at all is a puzzle. But they had gathered here from all the world without a word of instruction or suggestion from anyone. It was only a sort of psyschebiological urge that had told them to come exactly here

exactly now.

“We are met here and we hardly know why,” said Jorge Segundo. “We know each other not at all personally and only slightly by reputation. We are called here, but who is the caller? We come like lemmings.”

“The Lemmings came today,” said Toy Tonk, “but only seven of them, and they not at all in a panic. Nor are we, though perhaps we should be. This is perhaps the ‘Childhood’s End’ as foretold by the Clarke in the century past. Will this now be ‘The Second Age of Man’? And will ourselves seem children in comparison to the man (so far he is reported as singular in all ways) who comes?”

“This is perhaps the New Morning, the Epiphany of one more of the ‘Nine Billion Names of God’ as phrased by the same Clarke, and we will either be ourselves magnified, or we will be reduced to something less than children,” Lisa Baron said lightly. “But we do not know anything is happening.”

“I stood and talked to a camel this afternoon,” said Charley Mikakeh, “and you say that nothing is happening? ‘What do you make of all the new and strange animals passing through?’ the camel asked me. ‘It’s a puzzler, is it not? And what do you make of myself talking? I and the very few others of my species have not done that for a very long time, not since the mushroomns still had prepuces as a normal thing, and yourself began to walk upright. It’s an off thing, Ape, is it not?’ ‘I am Man and not Ape,’ I told the Camel, somewhat stiffly, I’m afraid. But the very fact that there was this conversation with a Camel indicates that something is happening. “

“Perhaps only inside your own head, Charley,” Abatole jibed. “I have had conversation with a variety of animal species myself today. All say that it is unusual with them; not .it in common for their species to be able to talk. Yet I find it less strange than that we seven, previously unknown to each other, should be gathered here and talking together.”

“Oh, we are the seven magic people,” Hatari said rationally, though he now had a not quite rational look in his eyes. “Every age of the world (and I believe that our own has been the pentultimate age) has its seven magic people who come together by psychic magnet at a hinge time. We are the spokesmen for the rest. But if we are the spokesmen, what will we say, and to whom?”

“If we be people indeed (And we never doubted it till this day) then we



will speak it to our own variant (this mysterious Shining Man), and it will be given to us in that moment what we should say,” Helen Rubric was murmuring with her eyes half closed. “But I am very edgy about all this, and I believe that we are really coming to the edge. There is something wrong with the setting and the set.”

“What do you say, Helen?” Jorge asked. “What is wrong with the set?”

“The set is off; it is gone wrong. Both the picture and the sound seem doubled, Jorge.”

“Cannot it be fixed? But what am I talking about? I do feel for a moment that we are no more than animated cartoons on a screen. But this isn’t a TV set; it is something larger.”

“Tgis set is the whole-world set, Jorge,” Helen Rubric muttered. “And it has gone too far wrong to be fixed by ourselves. It may be fixed by this New Fixer who comes. But I feel that we ourselves are diminished and detnoted, that we are put into a shadowy box now and confined to a narrow corner.

“I gazed upon my own double today and talked with her. She said that her name was Mary Rainwood. She seemed to take a saddened and sisterly view of me. She is an animal of the species Orangutan; and if we are sisters under the skin then hers is under the thicker and hairier skin; I might say that hers is the harder skin to get under. I know her species, but of what species am I an animal?

“It was odd that she was able to speak. She says that it only happens in the last seven days of an age. It seems equally odd that I am able to speak, and I really wonder whether I have been doing it for more than seven days. I believe that our own era has been a very short one and a deponent one.”

It was something like a ski lodge there in that private club room of the International Hotel of Mosul. Very cozy there by the open fire at night after a strenuous day on the snow slopes. What open fire? What snow slopes? That was all illusion.

It was more like a cave they were in. Open fire or not there was a flickering and a shadowing on the cave walls. And the talk among them became more an more shadowy on that last night of the Age.

It was morning then. It hadn’t been such a long evening and night, only a few hours. It hadn’t been such a long Age, no more than thirty or forty thousand years. They went out in that morning to a place a little bit

beyond Mosul. Seven magic persons on either the last or the first morning of their magic.

#### 4.

Yours: — nervous sort of apish lives,  
Derivative the while:  
And, somehow, derro-concrete hives  
Have not a lot of style.

The Shining Man hadn't arrived from anywhere. All ways of coming had been watched by some or other of the creatures. And yet he was there now on the crown of the animated hill. He was very much as all the creatures had supposed that he would be, before they had seen him at all: not really shining, not of imposing stature, with an inexperienced and almost foolish look on his face, not complex, not at all magic; competent, though, and filled with an uneasy sort of grace.

He was not nervous. Nervousness, of course, was not possible for such an excellent one as he was. But he was in some pain, for he was already in light travail.

The animated hill was merely a wide low hill (higher, though, than the high hills around it) covered with creatures. They were in tiers and files and arrays, they were in congregations and assemblies and constellations. Creatures almost beyond counting, enough seemingly to cover the Earth, and they did very nearly cover the wide hill.

The man appointed and named them, speaking to them with an easy dominance, and then sending them away again, species after species, speechless again for another era, yet having their assigned places and tasks for a new age of the world.

Earth-worms, beetles, damsel-flies, honeybees, locusts, cicadas came and went. They had slightly new assignments now in a world which would be at least slightly different. Shrikes and eagles and doves and storks came through the crowded air. They spoke; sometimes they argued; they were convinced, or they accepted their assignments without being convinced. But they winged away again, speechless now once more, but far from soundless.

Time became diffused and multiplex, for the man imposed and directed thousands of species while the Sun had hardly moved. Space also was extra dimensionable, for the wide low hill could not have served as staging space for so many species in the normal order of things.

“We will be the last ones,” Lisa Baron said to her magical companions. “As we are the highest species, the lords of the world, so we will have the final instruction and appreciation. Ourselves, the first age of mankind, will receive confirmation and approval from this aberrant creature who (however unlikely he seems) ushers in the second age of mankind. I beg you all, confer with him straight-faced and in all seriousness. Consider that his office is more important than himself. We are the giants and he is the dwarf, but he is higher than ourselves for he is appointed to stand on our shoulders. “

“We will not be the last ones,” said Jorge Segundo. “Carl you not see that all these confrontations and instructions are simultaneous? And yet we wait. It is as if he notices all the others and not ourselves; he is probably jealous of our basic stature. But do you not see that even the trees and grasses come and go, speaking with him in their moment, and then going away speechless again to their own places. It is the unnaturing of the ecology that happens now, the preternaturalizing of the ecological balance. The natural world was always out of balance. There could not be a balanced ecology before or without man. Well, but why did we not bring the balance in our own time? Are we not men?”

The whales went away, greatly pleased and greatly relieved about something. And yet, all that the man had done was bless them and say ‘Your name is Whale.’

There were long conversations with some of the species, and the man was forced to become eloquent with these. But the long confrontations did not use up great quantities of time. All these things were telescoped and simultaneous.

“Your name is Lion,” “Your name is Buffalo,” “Your name is Donkey,” the man was saying. The man was tired now and in more than light travail. But he continued to name and assign the creatures. There was much discussion and instruction in each case but they did not consume much time. “Your name is Swine,” for instance, was a total statement that contained all that discussion and instruction. The palaver was like a scaffold that is disassembled and taken down when the building is completed. “Your name is Carp-fish” was such a completed structure with very much of stress and synthesis having gone into it.

“Your name is Ape,” the man said, smiling in his pain.

“No, no, no, we are men,” shouted Joe Sunrise, that big and brindled

ape from Little Asia. “We are not ape. It is the miserable half-creature there who called us ape. Can he be right about anything?”

“Not of himself, and surely not about himself,” the man said. “But he hadn’t this knowledge of himself. He is only an air and a noise. Remember that you yourself had the day when you named the names: You named lion and buffalo and mammoth and others. This half-thing also had his shorter day. It may have sounded as though he said, and perhaps he did say ‘Your name is Ape.’ I do say it. ‘Your name is Ape.’ Now go and fill your niche.”

There was much more to it, as there was to every confrontation, yet it consumed little time. There was lamentation from Mary Rainwood and Kingman Savanna and Linger Quick-One and others of their group. There were hairy visages and huge brown eyes staining with tears. But the apes were convinced and almost at peace when they finally accepted it and went away, speechless again but not noiseless, shedding their robes and wrappings and going hairy. They were confirmed as apes now, and they would be more fulfilled apes than they had been before.

It seemed that there was only one group left. Really, it had seemed to every group that it was the last one left; and yet every group had heard the naming of every other group, for it was all simultaneous.

“Well, come, come, my good man,” Anatole Kashish said to the man, and he clapped his hands for attention. “Now that you have disposed of the animals (and you did do it neatly, even though you were a little too wordy about it sometimes), it is time that we had our talk. We will clue you in on the world situation. Then we will be willing to listen to your special mission and message. I believe that we have been waiting for the message a long while, though drankly we expected it to be brought by a more imposing messenger.”

“You haven’t any name,” the man said with an almost bluntness. “Your particular species vanishes now as a separate thing. It has never been a real species. It hasn’t either body or spirit; only air and noise. Several of the creatures were correct in calling you the interlopers, the half-creattires. Be submerged now! Be nothing!”

“No, no, no, we are men,” Jorge Segundo cried out very much like the brindled ape Joe Sunrise had cried out the same words. “We are the lords of creation. Ours is the world civilization. We are the First Age of Mankind.”

“You were the Second Age of Apedom,” the man said, “and an abridged and dedective age it has been. I intuit that there have been other such unsatisfactory half-ages or no-ages. Ah, and I am responsible for getting rid of the clutter you have left.”

The magic had suddenly gone out of the seven persons or erstwhile persons. Pieces of it that had fallen off them seemed to shine like jellyfish on the ground.

“We have fission, we have space travel,” Hatari Nahub protested. “We have great cities and structures of every sort. “

“I intuit all this,” the man said. “You are a hiving species, but your hives and structures do not have the style of those of the bower-birds or the honeybees or the African termites. I have wondered a little, though, how you build up these ferro-concrete hives that you call cities. Do you accrete them by deposits of your regurgitations or your excrement after you have eaten limestone and iron ore? It’s a grotesque way, but the blind and instinctive actions of such hive creatures as yourselves always seem grotesque to thinking creatures such is myself. Such mindlessness, such waste in all that you do! The ferro-concrete and wood and stone and chrome hives-colonis that you construct for the billions of inmates, they are more strange, more mindless, of less use than would be so many great ant-hills. Go now, you mindless leaving folk. You tire me.”

“But we have civilization; we have the electromagnetic complex and the nuclear complex,” Charley Mikakeh challenged.

“And the fire-fly has a light in his tail,” the man said. “Go. Your short day is done. “

“But we have all the arts,” Toy Tonk claimed, and she was very near the art of tears.

“Can you sing like the mockingbird or posture like the peacock?” the man asked. “What arts do you have? Go now.”

(This was not really a long argument. The crows had argued much longer, and just for the jabbering fun of it. Besides, this was happening at the same time that all the other decisions were being given.)

“We will not go. You have not namied us yet,” Helen Rubric spoke.

“It will be better if I do not speak your name,” the man said. “You will shrivel enough without. Go back to your hive cities and decay in their decay. Your speech now becomes gibberish and you begin your swift decline. “

“Why, I know who you are now,” Lisa Baron exclaimed. “You are the Genesis Myth. In fact you are the Partheno-Genesis Myth. Is it not strange that no language has a masculine form of parthen, and yet it appears to be the oldest. Now I know why the Myth is in pain. From your side will it be? I am a doctor, among other things. May I assist?”

“No,” the man said. “You may not. And know you something else, female of the unnamed species: every myth comes true when enough time has run. There was a great myth about the earthworm once. There was even a sort of myth about yourselves. And you, creature, have a little more than the rest of your kindred. It seems a shame that you have already come and gone before the scene itself begins.”

“We have not gone, we will not go,” Anatole Kashish insisted. “Everyone is of some use. What can we offer?” Then his tongue had lost its cunning forever.

“You can offer only your submission and retrogression,” the man said.

“Ah, but tell us finally, what is our real name?” Hatari Nahub asked. Those were the last true words he ever spoke.

“Your name is Ape,” the man said. “Really your name is ‘Secondary Ape.’”

There were fair and dark visages, and blue and gray and brown eyes shining with tears. The seven followed the other seven away, speechless forever, shedding their robes and wrappings, knowing that the blight was already upon their already obsolete world-hives, knowing that their minds and talents were dimmed, and then not really knowing anything ever again.

## ROYAL LICORICE

*From Catfish crop and Mud-Goose  
tears*

*And Cimmaron mud River:  
For fifty cents a thousand years,  
And for a brick for-iver.*

— *Boomer Flats Ballads*

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Black Red had been sixteen years at stud. This was after a strict colthood and eight years of competitive horse racing. Now he had become a very slow and undependable stud. He was one old horse.

He gnawed a clump of prickly pear. He had been a stupid and rock-headed horse from his youth, and now that his eyes were shot he would eat anything. His owner chewed on a length of big bluestem grass and contemplated him. It was too bad to sell, for nine dollars for cat meat, a horse that had earned five million dollars. But what else could be done with the old animal?

But Black Red smelled a brother horse, an old flyer like himself, and he raised his head. So did the owner, and he saw in the distance a rare contraption: an ancient horse pulling an ancient medicine wagon that had once known gay paint; and the driver was more than ancient; he was timeless.

Then the contraption had bridged the distance too quickly to be believed, and it came to a halt in that grassy lane across the rail fence from Black Red and his owner.

“I, sir,” said the driver of the contraption, “am selling Royal Licorice, the concoction that will halt and reverse aging in any creature. Buy it and use it, and you can have for your horse restored youth and great length of days. I sell it for fifty cents a small jug and a dollar a large.”

“Why don’t you use it yourself, old man?” the owner of Black Red asked.

“I do. Would you believe that I am more than a thousand years old?”

“No, I wouldn’t, but you look as if you were. And your own horse?”

“Would you believe that he also is more than a thousand years old? Why do you hesitate? I don’t make a lot of this, and I offer it only by chance as I go. It’s by your happy chance that I’ve met you here today,



sir.”

Black Red neighed hopefully.

“See,” said the peddling man. “He wants it. Your horse is smarter than yourself, sir.”

“Not at all. Some of my horses may be, but Black Red is a rock-head. In his own day he his way by his great speed and strength. He’d never have made it by his wits.”

Black Red had reached a very long neck through the rail fence, grasped the small jug of Royal Licorice in his uneven teeth, and then swallowed the whole thing on one brave, horsey gulp.

“Will it hurt him, do you think?” the owner asked. “It won’t matter really, for he’s about at the end of his line. But I like the Roman-nosed fool, and I’d not have him suffer a choking death.”

“It will hurt him not at all,” the timeless peddling man said. “The clay of the jug dissolves at once when it reaches the stomach. Watch now! The change is startling when you’ve never seen it before. You have the finest and fastest colt in the world here, Sir. Watch.”

Black Red gave a great snort, a youthful snort. He took off through the short cropped Blue-Stem with a clatter of hoofs. He ran, and he changed. His was a great colush gallop, and he now had the movements and appearance of a fine colt. When he was a half mile off, he half-turned as if going into the backstretch. He stretched and he ran, and the owner was seized with the shouting madness. That man knew speed when he saw it, real speed, winning speed. And the big colt was growing more glossy and more beautifully muscled by the second. He was dark cherry color. He was heroicany swift.

“You owe me fifty cents for the small jug he took,” the peddler said.

“Yes, here,” said the owner. “I don’t believe it, but my eyes have never lied to the before. Where can I find you if I want some more of it?”

“Oh, I’ll be around before he needs it again.”

“What’s your name, old fellow? Or should I say Thousand-Year Young fellow?”

“They call me the Licorice Man.”

Old Cyrus Slocum was throwing rocks at a fence post. This was up in the gypsum hills where old Cy had his ranch. It wasn’t much of a ranch, but the rocky, bitter gypsum of it was in accord with the man himself.

Slocum wasn’t really unhappy. He had money; he had his stingy land

(as stingy as he had used to be with a bingle); he had his memories; he had his good right arm, a little mellow now it's true; he had a few cattle.

Cy Slocum (you may not remember it about him if you are young, for the first time) had been about the greatest baseball pitcher ever. But the end of his career had been more than forty years before. He had been a six hundred game winner. He had once pitched ninety-nine consecutive scoreless innings; he had maintained an earned run average of .92 over a five year period. He had had it all.

And even now, as an old man, Slocum was hitting that fence post resoundingly. he would angle on a knee high slicer that just caught a bit of the post. He would hit it dead center with a should-high fast rock. And, when he threw his change-up, that fence post seemed to lean weakly towards him in drustration.

"I could have been half way to second, and you skylarking there on the mound," came a voice, friendly but full of timeless authority. "What? Do you no longer use the eyes in the back of your head?"

"I remember you from somewhere," Slocum said as he turned to see the ancient man with the venerable horse and medicine wagon. How could it have supped up on him when it had to clatter up that rough and rocky gypsum road?

"It was the year you first tried out with the St. Louis Browns," the timeless man said, "and what antiquarian remembers the old Browns now? You ran athwart a barnstorming bunch of bearded men. "

"The House of David!" said Slocum with friendly awe in his voice. "Now they were ball players and they beat many of the major league teams. But we took them three to nothing that afternoon. I two-hit them."

"It's another and more outsized bunch of bearded blokes that I meant," said the ancient traveler.

"Now you open an angry wound," Slocum almost moaned. "That afternoon-mare of a game has stuck in my undermind for this much more than half a century. They called themselves the Flats, I believe it was. Off name, off bunch. They had half a dozen real giants; must have been over eight feet tall, some of them. The Flats, the Boomer Flats they called themselves."

"Yes, we had some pretty good-sized fellows on our team," the travelling man said. They were the Uncles, the Old Bachelors, the Bashful

and Silent Ones. “

“You’d unwind pretty long,” Slocum said, “but not that long.”

“I’m six six,” said the traveler. “I was a little taller then, but I’m not one of the Uncles. I’m the little shrimp who played third base.”

“Eiggten runs they tagged me for in that first inning,” Slocum remembered blackly, “and the man kept me in there and let me suffer.”

“It was fortuitous,” said the traveler. “You made every mistake that a young pitcher could make. But most of them you never made again. ‘Twas luck you met us. Slocum, how would you like to have your arm back again, at its strongest, and at the same time keep your wits at their wisest? How would you like your youth back without losing a drop of your later acquired wisdom and savvy?”

“Wouldn’t that be something, fellow? Who are you?”

“I’m the Licorice Man. This horse here is named Peegosh. He’s better than my regular horse. He belongs to the Comet; but the Comet isn’t traveling this year, and Peegosh wanted to amble the country with me a bit. What I sell is Royal Licorice; fifty cents a small jug, a dollar a large.”

“I’ll take a small one,” Cy Slocum said. They transacted. Then Slocum took a great swig of the stuff. He began to throw rocks at a fence post again, but now he was throwing at one three posts down the line. Hitting it too. And he was throwing like a young man.

“It works, doesn’t it,” Slocum said.

“Sure it works. Always does. And your hair is turning black again.

“I know it. I can feel it.” He continued to throw. How that young fellow could throw those rocks!

The indomitable old dame had been driving an indomitable old Duesenberg. Both of them had been restored, polished and groomed in amazing fashion, and both looked good. The old dame and her old car had received a special award at the Antique Auto Festival Southwestern Division show. And the award read: For class, which doesn’t have to be defined. There was no money attached to this award as there was to the first and second and third prizes. That didn’t matter. The old dame didn’t need it. She was pleased about the whole thing. She purred along in the sporty Dusie on a fine little country road, she remembering, and the snazzy little old Dusie remembering.

Then they were passed by a long-legged, fast-ambling horse that pulled a flake-panted medicine wagon. Listen, nobody passed the old

dame and the old Dusie like that! A horse and wagon sure does not.

She nounced, however, that, while the hoofs of the stilt-legged, stripling horse struck sparky fire at every step, yet these hoofs did not quite touch the roadway. That horse was going along six inches in the air. (Don't mention it, though; there would have to be explanations or denials.)

Then the horse was reined in ahead, and the old dame stopped the Dusie beside the wagon. An old, tall, raffish gentleman got out of the wagon and came over to her.

"Ma'am," he asked, "aren't you Flambeau La Flesche?"

"Sir," she said, "I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord, a fancier of antiques and myself an antique. "

"No, no," the man insisted. "You used to be in vaudeville. After that, you were a movie star."

"And now I am an old character actress," she said, "playing that old character, myself. You really remember?"

"Sure. Some of us used to dress up and take the train out Boomer over to Tulsa whenever you played it the Orpheum. You are Flambeau La Flesche, are you not?"

"I was. The publicity man who coined that name for me is buried in a potters field somewhere, I hope. He couldn't even spell Flesh. But now I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord. What are you chewing?"

"Royal Licorice Plug Tobacco."

"Well, don't be ungallant. Cut a plug for me too. I'm a country girl originally. You're from Boomer, are you? That dump!"

"No. No. I said we used to take the train out of Boomer. But I'm really from Boomer Flats."

"I apologize. They're as different as dusk and darkness, are they not? And the elixir you are selling, is it also called Royal Licorice?"

"Yes. Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder. You catch on fast, Flambeau."

"I always did," she said, and she spat a beautifully straight stream of black Royal Licorice tobacco. The Licorice Man almost hesitated in offering her the benison of returning youth. She was one dame had grown old gracefully. But he was peddler deep in the long bones of him so he didn't hesitate very much.

"Flambeau, it goes at fifty a small jug, a dollar a large one," he said

with his easy finesse.

“All right, I’ll take a small one then.” She bought it. She took a thoughtful drink of it.

“What’s it made out of?” she asked. “Catfish, mud-geese tears, Cimmaron River, Royal Licorice chewing tobacco.”

“Mud-geese tears? Tell me, Licorice, what can make a mud-geese cry? What’s the one thing that can do it? This had better be good.”

The Licorice Man looked around durtively though there was no one else within a mile. Long-faced drollery had taken over his phiz.

“It’s a little raunchy, Flambeau,” he said then. “I’d better whisper it to you.”

“I’ll use it,” she said a while later as she wiped the smeared remnants of laughter from her face. “Raunchy, I’ll say. But lots of times we used words in my skits and movies, and raunchy tales go well with me.” She took another thoughtful drink of the elixir.

“Yes, I do feel something,” she said. “Wouldn’t it be funny if I could come back that way, all the way? I’d give them all fits if I had my girlhood again. And never was the competition shabbier. The little babes these days, they have so little talent that all they can do is peel it down to the buff. Me, I had class, so I never had to do that. I always kept my garters on. They called me the Golden Garter Girl.”

“I remember, Flambeau.”

“Oh, it’s working all right. I can feel it. Say, Licorice, pour a big jug of that into Dusie’s tank. He’d like to be young again too, not merely restored.”

The Licorice Man poured a big jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder into the tank of the snazzy little car. Flambeau paid him. Then she took off in the Dusie, leaving the smell of burning rubber and returning youth to drift above that fine little country road.

Tell all the boys that Flambeau La Flesche is back.

Did you tell them all?

Sure, tell those in the graveyard too. Then especially. It will give them a lift, and those who have proper clothes will come to see her.

Ex-President Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson was fishing along Exendine Creek on the Ex-Presidential Ranch in Kaw County Oklahoma. He was himself of a dead-fish complexion now, and so shrunk that the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots fitted him illy.

The Exendine Creek was only four feet wide at this place, but old Ex had cast his line far beyond its banks and had tangled it in some sumac bushes sixty feet on the other side of the creek.

Old Ex believed that the sumac bushes were Republican congressmen out to thwart him. He cursed them, and he chopped off their appropriations. Some days this would intimidate the bushes and cause them to release the line, but today they held it fast.

A man with in animal and wagon came bumping along.

“Are you registered, friend, and will you vote right?” Ex asked the man in what had once been a great voice.

“I am and I will,” said the man. He was the Licorice Man; no use keeping it a secret from you; you’d find him out anyhow. And the Licorice Man was untangling Ex’s line from the bushes.

“And the donkey, is he registered?” Ex asked.

“He’s a horse and not a donkey,” the Licorice Man said. “He is registered, but how he votes is his own secret. Reel in, man.”

“I know that a donkey will always vote my way,” Ex said, reeling in his line, “but I never trusted a horse. What did you do with the fish that was on my hook?”

“Don’t you one-up me, Hiram Andrew Clayborne,” the Licorice Man said.

“How would you like to be restored to your youth and to your faculties? Then you could run again. You have just nine days to the for the first primary.”

“There’s no restoring needed for me,” old Ex said. “My wits are as they always were.”

“True, true,” said the Licorice Man. “Sad but true.”

“And I still have my same fund of fine stories, and I still have my great name. I always say that I am the only Apostle who ever became president. There was all earlier president Andrew Johnson. it’s true, but he wasn’t the Apostolic type. But I have the Andrew Johnson in my name somewhere. Andrew, as you know, was the brother of Peter. Boy, look up chapter and verse for me quickly! I wonder where that boy has gone. He’s never around any more. And Christ once said ‘Peter, Son of John’ so that was his name, ‘Son of John,’ ‘Johnson,’ get it? And I, as Peter’s brother, am Andrew Johnson, the only Apostle who ever became president.”

“Yes, you still have your same fund of stories,” the Licorice Man agreed. “And you still have your great name. But there are restorations needed. Your voice is cracked and broken. Your eyesight is about gone. You are stooped and old and toothless and hairless and deaf, and you smell like a goat. As you are, you just don’t inspire confidence.”

“Have I aged? Is it true? that I have aged?” old Ex asked.

“It’s true. Now, what I can do is...”

“How much?”

“Yours is a hard case. Nothing short of a big jug will do it. One dollar.”

“Have you figured excise tax in that? Ex-Presidents are exempt from excise taxes, you know. I had that regulation passed myself.”

“Seventy-one cents, then,”

Old Ex fished out the seventy-one cents from somewhere. He took a jolt from the jug; then another; then another. He began to fill out to the size of the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots. He began to talk in the high manner.

The horse Pegosh was restive. So horse, man, and wagon, took their bumpy farewell. Behind them the Apostolic voice of Hiram Andrew Clayborne rose in cracked and broken thunder. And then the cracks were healed by the miracle of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder.

The strength and timbre came back to that voice. The power came back. It was a restoration, a resurrection. It was a new manifestation in all its former glory. It was itself again; the Golden Calf. Country, look out!

And there were other persons restored and re-youthified in those crisp late winter days. But if all that happened was told, there’d not be paper enough in the world to record it all.

2.

For both, the year bloomed pulsey red:

Contraries and Compliant.

A Springtime of the Ghosts, they said;

A Springtime of the Giants.

— Boomer Flats Ballads

The wonder colt Red Licorice seemed ready to sweep the big four that year from his bruited reputation. And this was when the public had not yet seen him run. There was a big noise about him from the men who

knew these things. No unknown was ever so widely known so quickly.

He was possibly the last colt ever sired by that grand old champion Black Red. And Black Red, full of years and honors, had died only a short time before this, according to his owner. He had been buried at a private ceremony, very private; but an imposing stone, red granite with black obsidian inset, had been mounted over the grave. There were now several hundred visitors a day who came to that grave, and these visitors were told that the horse buried there now lived again in his son.

Red Licorice was the absolute image of his great sire. Early films of Black Red as a colt were run, and you would almost swear that this was the same animal that now trained daily at the Red Hills Barn. The long low gallop, the laid-back ears, the rhythmic hooved thunder, the snorting that sounded half-horse and half-wolf, the red-black mahogany gleam, the bowed neck that was almost bull-like, the very long and large (and, some said, empty) head, the flowing tail and streaming mane, these were all identical in the father and the son.

But Red Licorice had sheared three seconds of the mile and a half time of Black Red, on the same practice track, under the same almost perfect conditions.

Then Red Licorice won four warm-up mile and a quarter races, and he won them easily, this against the best colts in the world in what was billed as the Year of the Great Colts. Red Licorice set four new track records in doing this and three of them had been held by his father.

Derby time came, too soon, too soon. The steep interest in the affair was still climbing. But it would be a Derby to be remembered as long as Men and Derbys last. Red Licorice took the Derby in really sensational fashion, and now this magic colt had taken the fancy of all race-dom. As rock-headed as his father had been, he also had his father's outrageous talent as a ham actor. How that big colt could cavort about a track!

Here were memories being made as one watched. Big Blue-Stem grass of the pastures where the colts were raised; black loam and red clay mixed and mingled and managed into the fine straightaways; smell of hot horses in the springtime and the summer (smell composed of clover and green oats and manure); weathered grandstands, and the blue-green infields at the tracks; winged money flying with the winged horses; the Sign of Equus and the Summer Solstice; these were ever the images of the year for millions of fine folks. And one magic colt could always turn it into



a magic year.

Cyrus X. Slocum the Third had shown up in training camp in Phoenix, unsolicited, uncontracted, unknown.

Yes, he was the grandson of the original Cy Slocum, he said. “You can’t trade on even a great name,” the manager told him, “you would have to make it entirely on your own.”

“I know it, I know it,” young Cy said. “Just let me pitch. Let me pitch and I’ll show everyone.” Well, he did look and move like an athlete. He did look very much like those old pictures of his grandfather. He had a strong personality, a strong arm, and outrageous confidence. “And it never hurts things for a player to have a great name,” the club’s publicity man said. So young Cy was given a try-out in the training camp.

They always kept the wraps on the pitchers for a couple of days at first, but Cy was ready to blast loose.

“Shape up my arm slowly?” he asked. “Man, my arm is always in shape. Haven’t we any heftier catchers than those? I’d blow them clear out of the park. You don’t have a steel back-stop here? I like to warm up with a sixteen pound shot at regular distance, but hard as I throw it it’d go right through anything here.”

Cy was scolded somewhat for standing against the centerfield fence and throwing half a dozen balls clear over the grandstand, very high above home plate and still rising till they went out of sight.

“Not only will you throw your arm away with that showboating,” one of the coaches told him, “but balls are too expensive to toss half a dozen of them away like that.”

“Nah,” Cy said. “The balls aren’t gone. I was throwing my famous return ball then. I put a little twist on it when I throw it, and it comes back to me.”

A small dot appeared in the sky far above and beyond the grandstand. The dot grew, it came as fast as a bullet, it grew to baseball size and it zanged into Cy’s glove there by the centerfield fence. And the other five balls followed it quickly.

“A long time ago I — ah, I mean my granfather — used to lob the ball up to the batters,” Cy said. “It would come almost all the way to a batsman, near enough to draw his swing most of the time. Then it would zoom back into my glove, I mean to my grandfather’s glove. I finally quit throwing it though. The umpires got together and decided to call them

balks instead of strikes whenever I threw my return ball even if the batter took a full swing at it.”

“The old-timers say that your grandfather told tall stories too,” the coach commented.

Cy pitched in inter-squad games, three innings one day, six the next, nine the day after that. The batters couldn't even touch him. He pitched about fifty inter-squad innings and never gave up a hit. The reporters were making a great to-do about this bright new rookie with the bright old name.

The team played the Giants who also trained in Phoenix then. They threw Cy at them in the first game and he no-hit them. Three days later he did it again.

He burned his way through all those exhibition games. He had a great collection of pitches of his own; and every good pitch that he saw he mastered instantly and added to his repertoire. He had the strength and speed of youth. He also had, from somewhere, such maturity and wisdom and judgment as could hardly be acquired in less than a lifetime.

The regular season began.

“Now we'll see what this early-blooming crocus can really do,” a few of the unsold critics muttered.

Young Cy Slocum, pitching every third oay, won his first thirteen games without a loss. There would be no limits at all to such a career as was opening up before him.

“How old are you anyhow, Cy?” a reporter asked him one day.

“Eighty-one,” Cy said promptly. Then he corrected himself. “No, no, I mean eighteen. I have a speech affliction; I sometimes get my numbers transposed.”

Flambeau La Flesche the zoom-zoom girl had zoomed to the top of everything with electronic swiftness. She was on Live; she was on 2-D, 3-D, and 4-D (you have to be smarter than hell to even know how to watch 4-D; only Mensa members are allowed to apply for tickets to see it); she was on Voxo; she was in five simultaneous musical comedies; she was on Vodvil and Sound in the Round; she was in the Old Time Electric Theatre; and she was big in Metranome. Already she looked like a shoo-in to take the Nobel Prize in the Centerfold Division. Few were the media in which she had not quickly become outstanding.

But had there not been a Flambeau La Flesche a long time ago? Had

that other young girl had not been identical to this both in name and appearance? Yes, even in voice.

“I suspect that I’m the same kid, only refleshed,” Flambeau told an interviewer. “I’m reincarnated, that’s what I am, and you have to have the right kind of flesh to do that. That’s what it means. I’m very carnal. That’s why I reincarnate so easy.”

Really, what else can you say of Flambeau? She did have the flesh, she did have a spirit as torchy as her name. She did have all the forms and resonances. She was everything, just as her preincarnation had been everything so many years before.

And as she found, as had the previous she, that there were only twenty-four or twenty-six hours in the day; she could never remember which, but there weren’t enough. Then she had a hot idea to save everyone money and to save herself drudgery and time.

“You, moguls, why don’t you just dig out the old movies that I made in my previous life,” she said. “I haven’t changed any since then. When you have class you don’t have to change. Just get them out and fill in the scratches and cracks and run them again. Nobody can know that it isn’t me, because it will be me.”

They did it. It worked. They ran all those old ones and they were explosive hits.

On, the names of those two timing great movies are like music: Louisiana Haystack, Popsie, The Cremation of Betty Lou, Zephyr Jones, The Day the Lilac Bush Burned Down, Nine Dollar Dog, Three Fish Out, Little Audrey, Crabgrass Street, Slippery Elm, Spider Spider Down Inside Her, Lady Bug Bongo, Accolade and Accolade Revisited (This latter had been titled Son of Accolade the first time around).

What Drama, what Comedy, what Music, what Memories!

But Flambeau wasn’t quite so happy with it that second time around. “I knew that the competition nowadays was nothing,” she said once, “but, after all, what is there to compete for? The Accolades aren’t what they used to be. And Accolade Revisited has an emptiness and irony that wasn’t, at first, intended. The thing about us excelling types is that when we ascend to great heights it is all the same as if we stood still and the world went down hill. We must have excelled too much; the world sure has gone down.”

“Miss Flambeau,” another interviewer asked her, “we know that you

are an old car fancier, but many of the big three restorers are puzzled and jealous about the restoration job you've had done on that old Dusenbergs. It's almost as if it were new. What's the secret?"

"It is new," Flambeau said. "The secret is to buy a dollar jug. A fifty cent jug is all right for people, but it just isn't enough for a snazzy speedster like that."

But the interviewer didn't seem to understand her.

"Why don't we produce *The World Under Louisiana Haystack* again?" she asked her producer. "That was a movie a girl could really put herself into."

"But, Flambeau, *The World Under Louisiana Haystack* was never finished," the producer said. "There were difficulties with it."

"Let's finish it then," she said. "The difficulties are the best part."

They set about the task of finishing it. There were real difficulties. The resolution of these difficulties might take all things to the end of this account, or to the end of the world, whichever came first.

"This is a job that calls for another jug," Flambeau said. "It may even call for a dollar jug this time."

Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson (great nephew of Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson) had won the first of the Presidential primaries, that of Massachusetts and Connecticut Plantations. So he was off and running ahead.

He took Florida State Conglomerate. That was expected. He took Los Angeles State, and that had not been expected. It was a big one.

Johnson was speaking well and often, nine times a day. It was the Golden Guff itself, and no one could do it like your Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson. In this, he reminded old-timers and historians of his own great uncle the President Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson. That Ex-President, by the by, was unavailable for comment or for appearance.

But the young Johnson campaigned energetically and wantonly, if not always well. He wore a scrape and grass sandals when he campaigned in the Chicano districts, though the Chicanos did not wear these things and many of them had never seen them before. He was decked out in Navajo bead-work and a Sioux war-bonnet when he spoke at a supermarket in Indianapolis. Indianapolis really meant Indian City, didn't it? Johnson went equipped with skullcap and nine phrases of Yiddish into the adjacent Jewish suburbs. He wore a miter and alb and carried a crosier

when he went into Irish Catholic neighborhood; and he offered what he said was holy water from Exendine Creek. "Nine doctors out of ten state that it is more efficacious than Lourdes water," he declared, "and it contains eleven more affitives." He wore a zebra-hide cape and crocodile-tooth necklace when he entered the chocolate suburbs. "For our common African heritage," he would say. "One of my ancestors was Postmaster General for the Pharaoh Ra-ta-ta."

He opened a wild but calculated blood-letting against the other candidates of his own party. "They have turned the House of Our Fathers into the Outhouse of our Fathers," he would roar in his golden roar. There was nothing gingerly about his attacks; he left no stone unthrown in his assaults. What matter? He could always unlet the blood, he could always unthrow the stones again when there might come the proper time for it. Often he hummed to himself that old healing melody 'Will you love me in September as you hated me in May?' Of course they'd all love him in September, if he won the nomination. Their heads would roll else.

He won the primary in Chicago Metropolitan, a high-number delegate state. He won it narrowly by means of a little over a million votes that came in or were discovered very late, the morning after the voting. They had been unaccountably overlooked in the tabulations of the evening before.

He most handily won the primary in Missouri Valley, that grand old state with its capital it Omaha. He had lost a few along the way, but we will not mention those. He was leading, it was believed, and he should increase his lead in what was still a close race.

Then it came, a threatening and chilling storm of a cloud no bigger than a man's thorax. While yodelling at Swiss Colony Wisconsin, Johnson's golden voice broke; it broke into a cavernous old-man cough. Several rude persons laughed. This could go badly. There is nothing so contagious or epidemic as laughter. Johnson got his broken voice temporarily fixed at nearby Koffkoff Wisconsin, the cough drop capital of the world. But he knew that the fixing was only temporary.

"I'll have to get hold of that Licorice Man," C. H. A. Johnson told himself. "I'd better get another big jug of it. That'll come to seventy-one cents, taking the exemption for excise tax. I'll have to find a way to afford it."

3.

Deprived of elixir, a Horse,  
A Pitch, a Pres, a Lassie;  
And three erupted crass and coarse,  
And one was kind of classy.

— Boomer Flats Ballads

There would have to be confrontation. And just how does one go about arranging a confrontation with a vagabond peddler like the Licorice Man who has no regular residence except the misty, muddy, half-mythical place named Boomer Flats?

One uses intuition; one uses deduction; one uses that other thought process whose name is at the moment forgotten. And one does not eschew luck. (Is eschew a real word? It sure does sound funny, and it sure does look funny.)

Young Cy Slocum had pitched in Dallas the day before, and he had lost three to nothing. Never before in his young career had he allowed three runs in one game. He had tired. And new gray hairs had been peppering his youthful head for several days now. He needed another jug of the Royal Licorice and he needed it quickly. He got permission to drive up to his ranch in the gypsum hills. He borrowed a car and drove. He stopped at his ranch only an hour or so. Then he drove it random. His receptors were open to any kind of signal.

Half a dozen miles from his own ranch, on the fringe of the Big Blue-Stem country, by the side of a little country road where the gypsum begins to merge with honest limestone, Slocum saw an angry young colt who seemed not quite so young as he should be. This colt was widely known, and his name was Red Licorice.

With the colt was his owner, a man whom Slocum had known casually for a dozen years.

“Are we looking for the same thing, Cy?” the owner asked.

“I think so,” said the young, but not quite so young as he should have been, Cy Slocum.

“Red got a package from that devilish old codger,” the colt-owner said. “It was full of either pills or dung-beetle rollings. Red took a few of them. They didn’t have the same restoring effect on his as the original elixir had had. They had all effect quite otherwise, unique, and unpleasant. I can’t stand a horse when he gets too smart. “

Red Licorice snorted his contempt for his owner, for the old codger who had sent him either pills or dung-beetle rollings, and for the woozy world itself.

Eleven new, beautiful, qualified, turreted, bulletproof cars approached in caravan. They stopped by the pitcher, the colt-owner, and the angry young colt. Out of the cars bound presidential candidate Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson, a speechwriter, a lawyer who as also bodyguard, a chauffeur, and twenty-one security men.

“Disperse, all of you!” the head security man ordered. “We are commandeering this area. an important meeting will take place here soon.”

“I think so too,” the colt-owner said, “but I’ll not be commandeered into or out of anything.”

“You are standing in a public roadway,” the head security man said. And the road was built with mixed funds that included five percent Federal monies. Theredore, we as Federal men can commandeer this region.”

The colt-owtier took one step backward.

“I’m on my land now,” he said. “Let’s see you commandeer me.”

“It is all right,” Candidate C.H.A. Johnson said. “I know the colt and both the men. All three are solid citizens.”

“Careful, careful,” the speccli-@vrter said. “You’ll put your foot in it some way.”

(Johnson wasn’t supposed even to say Good Morning unless he read it off a piece of paper handed to him by his speechwriter.)

A golden-haired young, or almost young, lady came over the hill in a Dusenbergs car. The Dusenbergs also was almost young, but it had developed a bad cough. It stopped and died there.

“So, that’s the way it is,” said the almost young lady. “A sharp young pitcher (but not quite as sharp as he was for a while) who is his own grandfather; a rock-headed colt who’s had to run on his father’s hoofs; a presidential candidate trying to stand out of his great uncle’s shadow, but whose shadows grow longer when evening comes and they will swallow a man. Who are we kidding? We are all second-timers. We are all in the same barkentine. But the Licorice Man will be along in a moment. I heard the hood-beats of the horse Peegosh; the hoofs never quite touch the road, you know.”

And the Licorice Man, the Medicine Wagon, and the horse Peegosh had arrived suddenly in clattering silence (the clatter was on a different plane; these weren't normal people, not the Licorice Man, not the Wagon, not the horse Peegosh).

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," slid candidite Johnson. "that will be seventy-obe cents, figuring the excise tax exemption."

"Careful, careful," the speechwriter said. "You'll put your foot in it some way." The speechwriter rapidly wrote out something on a sheet of paper and handed it to Candidate Johnson.

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," Candidate Johnson read dutifully. "That will be seventy-one cents, figuring the excise tax exemption."

"My equine associate would like a dollar jug of the elixir this time," the colt-owner said. "I'm afraid that the effect of the fifty cent jug has worn a little thin."

"I'll have to take a stock of it to last me through the season," Pitcher Cy Slocum said. "And I'll have to have a firm guarantee of sufficient supply every springtime. You let me run short, Licorice. They tagged me for seven hits yesterday, and that's something that never happens."

"I'm not sure that I want any more for myself," said Flambeau La Flesche. She was the golden-haired almost-young lady. "If I ever do want it and want it bad enough, I could probably make it myself. After all, I know the one thing that makes a mud-geese cry, and I'm probably the only reanimated one who does know. I never did use that story, Licorice. Really, it was a little too raw to tell.

"But Dusie here needs a jug now. This poor car has been suffering all sorts of ailments for the last several days."

"No, you'd not be able to make it yourself, Flambeau," the Licorice Man said. "Licorice can mean so many different things. I alone use the genuine licorice, and I alone know which it is. Do you believe it is the lykyrriza or wolf-root? Or that it is the glykyrrhiza or sweet root? Try them and see."

"Enough of this," said Cy Slocum the pitcher. "You have customers waiting while you jabber. A large dollar jug, please, and enough more to carry me through the season."

"There's only one jug of it left," said the Licorice Man, "and I'm going to pour it into the car Dusie. There won't be any more of it. I'm going on to other things."



“Aw horse hokey!” snorted the horse Red Licorice.

“There’s got to be more of it. Say, how come that horse can talk?” Cy Slocum asked in angry puzzlement.

“I sent him some smart pills,” the Licorice Man said. “That’s what I’m working on now. Anyone else want to try some smart pills?”

“No, I sure don’t. I’m plenty smart now,” Cy said emphatically. “I want the elixir!”

“Smart pills are the one thing I don’t need,” declared the candidate Johnson. “I’ve got more smart than anyone I’ve ever seen. I want some of the youth elixir. I want all of it!”

“Would smart pills make me smart enough to do the tough scene in The World Under Louisiana Haystack?” little golden-head asked.

“No, Flambeau. The World Under Louisiana Haystack should not be finished. Accolade Revisited shouldn’t have been finished either, you know, and it was. Too bad. Here, try these. One is a smart pill. The other is a dungbeetle rolling. Take one.”

“They look just alike.”

“Not to a really fine eye.”

Flambeau La Flesche took one of the offered pills, plopped it in her mouth, chewed it and swallowed it. The Licorice Man dropped the other pellet into the tank of the Dusie and also poured the world’s last jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder in there.

“Thanks,” said the Dusie, setting its motor to going with the sweetest purr ever. “I needed that.”

“You gave Dusie the smrt pill,” Flambeau said. “Then I ate the dungbeetle rolling.”

“I want a jug of that elixir!” pitcher Cy Slocum swore, “or I’ll spill conman brains and horse brains and wagon brains all over the road.” With his terrific speed he began to rifle fist-sized rocks at the contraption. They didn’t reach it. There seemed to be an airy but impermeable shield around horse and wagon and Licorice Man. They were a special case, and the rocks fropped back from them harmlessly.

“Fire on them, security men,” Candidate Johnson barked with his full golden voice. “Withholding the elixir is a warlike act against myself. Fire on them!”

Twenty-one men raised service revolvers and fired all together in one grand volley. And twenty-one bits of long lead bounced back from the airy

shield and rolled around in the roadway.

“Give me a jug or I’ll kick the three of you to pieces!” Red Licorice swore madly in horsey hate. And he began to let fly hoofs at the withholders.

“Watch it, horse-face,” the Licorice Man said rather testily.

“Watch it, junior,” the paint-flaked medicine wagon said.

“Watch it, buster,” the horse Peegosh neighed. “Two can play that kicking game, and I’ve never been bested.” Peegosh, it was now seen, had hoods of flame, and they did not quite reach down to the roadway. Neither did the wheels of the wagon, or the feet of the Licorice Man.

Nobody ever heard such a display of shouting, bawling, snorting, neighing, and just plain bad manners as followed. It was enough to make one ashamed of being a man or horse. Slocum beat on the airy shield with now bloody fists and shouted vile obscenities. Pray that his youthdul admirers never glimpse that side of the man! Johnson belched sulphur-flame and gave that merchandising conglomerate very hell as he ordered volley after volley to be fired into it. And the ignoble Red Licorice was the worst of them all, cursing in man and horse talk, stomping, gnashing, making dirty noises. That horse should never have been given smart pills.

The only bright spot was the golden-haired Flambeau. “I kind of liked that rolled-up dung-beetle ball,” she laughed. “When I am next the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord I will obtain a quantity of them and serve them to my guests. So few of that set are country people, they won’t know what they’re getting. Now back to being the old character actress and doing the indomitable dame bit. Toodle, all.”

She zoomed away in the Dusie. She was a pleasant golden blob in the far distance. Who else ever had the finesse to grow old gracehully twice?

She had class.

## THREE SHADOWS OF THE WOLF

There was a sheep-killing wolf about, and that redneck sheriff Otis Pidgeon would have to do something about it. It was a big wolf (everybody seemed to have seen it except the sheriff) and stories were clustering about it. The folks swore that it was a big gray wolf, not a red wolf, and that was impossible. One would have to go north a thousand miles to find a gray wolf. So the people were mistaken. But it wasn't like them to be mistaken about a country thing like a wolf.

The people also said that the big wolf might have a pack, that he might have three shadowy followers. But, if so, the three were really shadow wolves; they didn't leave tracks.

It was a gray wolf with a white slash at the crown of his head. Ribaul said that the wolf would weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. Ribaul was a Frenchman, and so the sheriff automatically divided his figure by two. That would still be a very large wolf. It loomed up gray, and it disappeared like a ghost. It killed and carried off sheep.

Royal Parish was almost the only sheep-raising parish around there, and even in Royal the sheep were raised in only a small district around Yellow Knife. And that was where Sheriff Pidgeon was raised too.

Pidgeon was a tall and gaunt young man with bulging blue eyes. He was a man who went ash-white when he was angry or terrified or embarrassed; it might be said that he blushed white. He was the most suspicious man in Royal Parish. For this reason he had never married, never courted a woman, nor formed any close friendship, nor deposited money in a bank, nor loaned or borrowed, nor trusted weather or fate. He was the right sheriff for Royal Parish, but likely not for any other place. The people in Royal had very dirty quicksilver in them and only a suspicious man could keep up with them. But what Pidgeon was suspicious of now was the strange wolf.

Ragley said that the wolf stood as tall as a shetland pony, but the lies of Ragley had always stood as tall as a jack pine in a brush thicket. Kenrad said that the wolf had ears like a panther, jaws with the snap of a gator, the muzzle of a moose, and a gait like a high-shouldered ox. Pidgeon was smart enough to know that no wolf looked like that. He was even sharp enough to understand that Kenrad had unwittingly described himself.

It was Ragley with the monstrously mobile features and the equally mobile heart who came through strongest on the wolf. Ragley was a widower with a thirteen-year-old daughter Clela. He was a liar by profession, and he farmed a little on the side. But Ribaul was the only one who described the wolf as if he even knew what a wolf looked like. Ribaul had been a roustabout and an animal tamer. He described the wolf as impossibly large, but he described it as a man would who knows just how a wolf is put together.

“I will tell you this, Pidgeon,” storekeeper Scroggins said. “You had better get that sheep-killing wolf before there is a man killed. This same thing happened a few miles south and it ended in a man being killed.”

“Anything can end in a man being killed,” Pidgeon said, “but it’s usually another man and not a wolf that kills him.”

“If you know where to draw the line between them, Sheriff,” Scroggins said. “Did you hear me, Sheriff? I said ‘if you know where to draw the line between them.’ I’d get to the bottom of this if I were sheriff for fifteen minutes.”

Pidgeon was suspicious of all of them there in the store: Scroggins, Ragley, Kenrad, Tadler, Corbey, Boston, Danby. “All right, Scroggins,” Pidgeon told him. “You are sheriff for fifteen minutes. Let’s see you handle it.”

“Just pin a badge on me and I’ll get to the bottom of it.” That got a sore spot. “You know the parish voted against an appropriation for a badge,” Pidgeon said. “Nobody remembers the last sheriff to have a badge.”

“Sheep disappeared from three more flocks last night, Pidgeon,” Danby said.

“Scroggins here will have it solved in fifteen minutes.”

“Not without a badge I won’t. But there’s some queer stories about that wolf.”

“Who’s starting them, Scroggins?” Pidgeon asked.

“Why, Pidgeon, I would say that the wolf is starting them,” Tadler broke in. “I would say that there’s a wolf hair behind every one of those wolf stories. They say that the wolf might not be exactly a wolf all the time. He disappears from a place and he travels mighty fast.”

“Yes, he’s in three different places too fast for any wolf,” Pidgeon said.

“Maybe he rides a motorcycle, Sheriff,” Ragley jibed.

Pidgeon went angrily out of Scroggins' store and applied himself to looking for the wolf. Well, there was this about him: he left big and obvious wolf tracks at the site of every killing and theft. He always left at least one slashed sheep. But the tracks couldn't be followed from one raid to another. They just died away.

Pidgeon drove his pickup truck up a back road to the site of the Tadler raid, and he pulled off the road. Tadler's place was full of outcroppings. The sheriff had been told where the raid had been, and moreover a dog was waiting to take him to it.

"Ah, you're nipped a bit, Little Harry," Pidgeon said to the dog, "but not as much as if you'd made a real fight out of it. There's a saying that a good sheep dog will stand to any wolf, but neither of us believes it. A dog smart enough to be a good sheep dog will know when he's outpowered. You have any opinions about that, Little Harry?"

Little Harry the sheep dog was abashed, though he and Pidgeon were friends. But he did lead the sheriff to a killed sheep, and to live sheep reposing around it. They ignore one of their dead fellows after he's cold. "Killed in neat wolf style, isn't he, Little Harry? And not too much of him eaten. And there is no sign at all of the four missing sheep. "Dammit, Little Harry, you should find some way of telling me what happened here." There were plenty of tracks of a very large wolf, but they didn't lead anywhere. "All right, Little Harry, which way did he go?" Pidgeon asked. Little Harry showed him, leading him across the rock croppings that held no prints. Then there were prints in the mud, and the wolf went onto the road itself. "He doesn't leave tracks on the road," Pidgeon said. "All right, which way did he go?" Little Harry lay down in the road with the air of having done all that was asked of him. He could not be urged to go further. Pidgeon left the dog, got in his pickup, and drove to the site of the Boston raid. It was six miles there. Boston had suffered thirteen sheep disappeared, and one killed and partly eaten by a wolf. This site also was near the road and did not require much walking in the rough country. It had been a considerate wolf in this. There were marks of several trucks here, Boston's, Tadler's, Danby's, Corbey's; they had come to investigate when the news had got around. There was one other heavy truck that may have been there first. Pidgeon knew Boston's sheep, and he knew that the thirteen missing ones were the best ones. Pidgeon found and pocketed two small pieces of brass. He could have found more of them if he had

looked long enough. Well, they were at least a small part of the explanation. Pidgeon went to the site of the Danby raid, glad again that the wolf was so considerate as to raid close to the road. It was about eight miles from Boston's place. They had all been here before him, all the trucks of the gathering angry men. Had the unidentified heavy truck been here also? Couldn't be sure. One sheep was killed and partly eaten, and nine sheep reported disappeared. And here was a dead dog. He, at least, had stood to the wolf, but he hadn't had much luck with it. Dandy George had been a fine large animal; he'd been killed by something larger. Pidgeon didn't find any brass here, and he didn't intend a long search for it. There were no wolf tracks except around the dead sheep (very plain, as though left there on purpose), and around the dead dog (barely discernible on the rocks there, as though the site was not of the wolf's choosing). Pidgeon found more tracks. The wolf had gone up onto the road. "One of the fellows said maybe the wolf used a motorcycle," Pidgeon mumbled. "He didn't, but maybe he used a truck. That wolf had a lot of man in him." There are very few wolves who will go down and slay one sheep, and then stand off and kill a number of them with a rifle. And then pick them off cleanly, carrying, not dragging. Pidgeon went to get Ribajil, the French bum and his part-time helper. Their connection had begun several months earlier when Pidgeon had locked Ribaul up in their little jail for cause. Ribaul had been living in a shack on rough land that belonged to a French farmer. Soon after the arrest, Pidgeon gave Ribaul part-time employment and the run of the place. Ribaul was a handy man, a big oaf with a head like a giant potato. He was strong as a mule, and like a mule he would refuse when he felt himself overworked; But Ribaul could track. "Hopping Hajistones!" Sheriff Pidgeon swore. "You fat-faced fool!" The French bum Ribaul had nudged Pidgeon's arm and made him miss a shot. It was too late to shoot again. The wolf was gone, and so was a night's work. "You splay-footed French fool, you'd better have a good reason for that." "No, no reason, Mr. Pidgeon, just a notion," big Ribaul said in a little voice. "I had a perfect shot. Why am I afflicted by a fool?" It was just before dawn, about eighteen hours after Pidgeon had got Ribaul to help him track the wolf. They had stayed with it all that time. Ribaul could track, but there was a lot of hocus in his methods. They had driven the back roads along the west end of the parish. The wind had been strong from the east, and Ribaul swore that he

could catch a whiff of a wolf when within a mile of him. "That's the way they work the bloods, Mr. Pidgeon," he said. "Track and backtrack till you pick up the scent. Then close in on it. Pass it by to the other side till you lose it again. Then box it in." "You aren't a bloodhound, Ribaul, though about the eyes and dewlap —" "I can't pick up a scent as quick as a good dog, but I know better how to close in when I have it. I'm smarter than a lot of dogs." Well, maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. They had the wolf boxed in several hours before sundown. They could drive no closer to it, and their box was a double section of land, a wild thousand acres, very rough. "Sometimes the wolf has followers," Ribaul said, "three other wolves who trail him, but sometimes they are only shadows. And there is a man who sometimes has three followers. They will be men for a while, and then they will be only shadows." "Rot, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. They walked and cross-walked, always to the windward of the wolf. Ribaul had a high loping walk and Pidgeon had trouble staying up with him. "We're crossing the same country a lot, Ribaul. You're sure you're onto him?" "The wolf moves too. He is a smart one. He began to move a couple of hours ago." They were going along a clear hogback ridge when Ribaul stopped. "The wolf scent is completely gone, Mr. Pidgeon," he said. "How could that happen, Ribaul?" "I'm afraid to ask myself how it could happen. Now I get a scent. Ah, I don't know how to say this. What I get now is a man scent instead of a wolf scent." "Well hickory-handled hell, Ribaul! Let's go after the man then!" They went after him. But a man is harder to follow than a wolf is. He hasn't the same pungency to him. Pidgeon and Ribaul separated at a rock cone with jack pines growing out of it; it was a place where crows roosted. Ribaul went around it to the north, and Pidgeon to the south. Pidgeon heard Ribaul whistling and he called to him to be quiet. Then he heard him no more. Pidgeon was coming into the throat of a draw a quarter mile beyond there when he picked up a scent. It wasn't a man's scent. It was a wolf's. Strong! "Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called. There was something in the brush, large and low, heavy gray and flash-white. "Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called again. It wasn't possible for a shot yet. The thing moved just often enough and far enough to prevent that. And it couldn't be seen clearly. "Ribaul, you fool, down this way!" Ribaul came from the north out of a tangle of rocks and brush. "He's in the brush just beyond us, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "Even I can get the wolf scent here." "Yes, he's changed

again. He's wolf now. I've been watching him a long time. He's a wolf now, but for a while he seemed to be something else." "What are you talking about, Frenchy?"

"It's hard to get the outline of a thing in the brush." They went after the animal then, never losing him again, never quite getting in a position for a shot at the canny beast. It was a ten-hour, frustrating, foot-smashing, weary chase. But the wolf wasn't hard to follow even in the dark. It was a gray wolf that sometimes flashed white in the clear night. A dozen times they were near to having shots, but every time the animal melted away and had to be picked up again. It didn't really move fast, but it was tireless, and it kept them at a dogged run most of the night. Several times, as if by mutual agreement, both parties stopped and rested. The wolf with the white slash on the top of his head was always to be seen, and the men never took their eyes off it in the pulsating dark. Pidgeon got a close look at it only once, and the wolf seemed to look at him with a man's eyes. "He's an odd one; Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "A wolf that sometimes travels in a truck and hunts with a rifle, he isn't the kind of wolf you meet every day." "Only a special kind of wolf can do that. And I won't say what it's called." "If you don't want to look down the wrong end of a rifle barrel at a cross-eyed sheriff, you'd better say what it's called. What kind of wolf might do that?" "Loup-garou?" "What's its name in English?" "I don't know. I never heard it in English." They went after the wolf again for what was left of the night. Pidgeon, using Ribaul as his left hand, working with definite aim, pinned the wolf against the very wide, clear slope he couldn't have missed. It was then that Ribaul, who should have been a hundred yards away, nudged Pidgeon's arm. The shot went high, and the wolf was away. "Ribaul, you open-ended idiot! If you've only a notion, it better be a good one." "Mr. Pidgeon, I'm ashamed to say what it was." "You made me miss the wolf! Why? Why?" "I had a sudden notion that he wasn't a wolf at all. I looked at his eyes, and at the blaze on his head, and I wasn't sure whether he was a wolf or a man. If you'd have killed a man, there'd have been trouble." "Ribaul, couldn't you see what he was?" "I could see every hair on him. I could even see the pulse move at his throat. But he looked like a man that I know. He is a man sometimes. He is loup-garou." "Tell me what that is, Ribaul, or, trouble or not, I'll kill me a man right here." "Oh, he's a wolf part of the time. And sometimes he's a man. If I am wrong, then I have caused you to miss a



wolf. If I am right, then I have saved you from killing a man.” “Let it go. Since it spent the night mostly on its own terms, it may have brought us near where it dens.” “A male will hardly den this time of year. Just lay up somewhere in cool rocks.” “Let’s find out where. I’ll take the draw. You take the thicket. I’ll show you that I’m not such a bad tracker myself.” And Pidgeon wasn’t a bad tracker. He picked up deep and firm wolf tracks almost at once. The hair was prickling on his neck with the feeling that the wolf intended to leave tracks that could be followed. There was a big old truck half-hidden in some shrub in the rocky meadow just above the draw. “Ah, the wolf’s own transport,” Pidgeon grinned the words to himself. It was moist in the draw, and the wolf, from his tracks, was very heavy. It would have gone far over a hundred and fifty pounds, and whoever heard of a wolf that big? The draw narrowed sharply, and the wolf kept to it. The soft, white lime sand on its floor left very clear tracks, show tracks, the biggest wolf tracks ever seen, and the clearest. The wolf at a slouch-walk leaves the hind foot ahead of the front-foot track. It is a five-toed track of the front foot, and a four-toed track of the hind foot (one of the back toes is small and rudimentary, and it does not track). The front paw is always the broader of the two. This wolf had very heavy front paws, almost as broad as those of a mountain lion. It was the coolest hour out of the twenty-four, and almost daylight. Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back foot right, Pidgeon found himself chanting it. Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back and that is where the sequence stopped — Stopped completely. Pidgeon stood erect and closed his eyes for a moment. Nothing that he’d ever known had prepared him for this. “The light is still pretty dim, and besides I’m tired,” he told himself, but he lied when he told it. He reasoned with himself a moment, and then he picked up the trail again. Well, it was a back foot, in a manner of speaking. In other circumstances there wouldn’t be anything frightening about such a well-known sort of print. But the print wasn’t that of a wolf’s back foot. Nor was the next one, nor the next. The wolf tracks had turned into man tracks. Well, the world has to have its back broken somewhere. Pidgeon followed the tracks of the man till the draw ended in a rock spread and no more tracking was possible. Pidgeon called to Ribaul. After a while the Frenchman came to him from an upper thicket. Ribaul took it all in with quick eyes, and he rubbed his head. “Was Jules Lamotte here with you?” he asked Pidgeon. “Why didn’t I see him if he was here?” “I haven’t seen

Lamotte for several weeks,” Pidgeon said with difficulty. “I haven’t seen him a dozen times in my life. I hardly know him. Are those his tracks? They may be old tracks. I believe that he lives near here. He may have made those tracks yesterday on his normal business.” “He does live near here,” Ribaul said. “And his tracks were not made yesterday. They were made short minutes ago.” “I didn’t see him, Ribaul. What kind of man is he really?” “He has a laugh with hair on it.” “That’s no crime, though perhaps it should be. And what else?” “He’s a man who has mutton, and does not keep sheep. And this is his place we come to.” Jules Lamotte was a big, sharp-muzzled man, with a sudden slash of white in his mouse-gray hair. He met Pidgeon and Ribaul in his kitchen doorway. “You are halfway welcome,” he said. “Did you kill the wolf?” “No, the wolf still escapes us,” Pidgeon said. “Didn’t you see us, and the wolf? We found your tracks, just where we lost those of the wolf, fresh tracks.” “I have not been out of my house last night or this morning.” “Then someone else has been wearing your feet,” Ribaul challenged. “What? Both of them?” Lamotte asked with a touch of harsh humor. “Yes. Or all four,” Ribaul said. “Can you explain what he means, Mr. Sheriff?” Lamotte asked. “Ribaul believes that the wolf is loup-garou. I understand that it’s French.” “It’s a child’s story, and not necessarily French,” Lamotte said. “Madelon, make breakfast for two new-come ones! Madelon! Do you hear?” “I hear,” she called from within, and she came to the kitchen. “Oh, for them,” she said. “All right.” Pidgeon had never seen Lamotte’s wife before. She was a good-looking woman. She made a heavy country breakfast for them and they were soon sat down to it. “How is it that you have mutton, Lamotte?” Pidgeon asked him. “I did not know that you had sheep.” “I do not. How is it that I have coffee? I have no plantation.” “Who are the three men in the picture there on the wall?” Pidgeon asked. Lamotte looked at it puzzled. “Oh, my brothers, I suppose,” he said. “I don’t remember ever seeing that picture before.” Why should a man say “my brothers, I suppose”? They were three bristly men in the picture, and they looked enough like Jules Lamotte to be his brothers. “They say you left your old place because of some kind of trouble,” Pidgeon said. “They don’t even know where my old place was,” Lamotte answered. “Yet they’re partly right. A settled man doesn’t change his abode in midlife if everything is peaceful.” “Yours is one of the places that the wolf hasn’t bothered, Lamotte.” “What could he bother here? I raise grain and cattle,

not sheep.” “Did you hear anything, Lamotte, during the night and dawn?” “You two men clattering around the rocks out there, trying to clatter quietly.” They ate pancakes and drank a little morning whisky and were not really unfriendly. “Is that your big truck in the rock pasture?” Pidgeon asked. “Yes, I seldom use it though.” “Does anyone use it?” “Why would anyone use that big old truck?” “Have you an enemy, Lamotte?” “I think so, yes. Or a friend who intends to kill me.” “Will you tell me who it is?” “No. It’s a private matter. You are welcome to stay. I must go check on a calf.” Lamotte went out of the house, walking stiffly as though he had perpetually sore ankles. “He lied to you, my husband,” Madelon Lamotte told them some time after Jules had gone. “He said that he had not been out of the house the night past. Yet he did leave yesterday, and he was gone the whole of last night. He arrived back in a daze, but only just before you two came. I feel that he isn’t well, even he isn’t sane. it’s though he had two different natures.” “Which two different natures, Mrs. Lamotte?” Pidgeon asked. But Jules Lamotte came back in then, and Madelon did not tell what she meant Later that day, after he had slept for a few hours, Pidgeon got certain equipment and then drove and walked to the last draw in which he had tracked the night before. He had to know whether those tracks would appear different by daylight. They didn’t. The only things that struck Pidgeon in a different light were his own tracks of the night before. How he had skittered about when he came to the spot where the tracks changed! What a wild little dance he had done! But all else was as he had remembered it. There were the wolf tracks; and then there were the man tracks. There was no other ending to the wolf tracks and no other beginning to the man tracks. If one set didn’t turn into the other in full stride, then evidence was meaningless. Pidgeon took pictures of them from different angles, thinking that the various shadings might tell something. He also went and got pictures and tire tracks of Jules Lamotte’s heavy truck. Then he drove to Yellow Knife and went to the store. All of them were there, Scroggins the storekeeper, Kenrad, Ragley, Tadler, Corbey, Boston, Danby. The store was the club, the place where they talked and played dominoes and checkers. “I’ve been out with the French tracker after the wolf,” Pidgeon said. “We will help you skin him,” Tadler grunted. “Let’s see how big he really is.” “We can’t skin it till we kill it. I had one shot. Ribaul made me miss.” “Why’d he do that?” storekeeper Scroggins asked. “He said that it was loug-garou and that if I

shot it I'd be shooting a man." "I say shoot it anyhow," Tadler harangued. "Get rid of the wolf no matter what he turns into. I say shoot every man that even looks a little bit like a wolf." "Then I'd have to shoot several of you here present," Pidgeon said. "It's mostly the French that turn into wolves," Ragley told them. "The French are superstitious; they believe in that stuff. Down in Beauregard Parish one time there was a big wolf came into the country with a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head." Pidgeon was startled. Had Ragley known that the present wolf had a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head? Another man had come into the store quietly. Pidgeon didn't look around, but he knew that it was the man with the funny look in his eyes and the white blaze on his head. There was also the impression of several other men now standing outside the store. "The hardest thing, when a man turns into a wolf, is right at the ankle bone," Corbey said. Corbey was a crafty old swindler and he was about to wrap his tongue around something rich. "It hurts there at the ankle. You see, what appears to be a wolf's knee has its bend opposite to a man's, but that is really the same as a man's ankle bone, not his knee bone. The wolf's real knee is hidden up in the haunch. When a man turns into a wolf his ankle bone has to expand about eight inches. You find a man who turns a lot and you'll find a fellow who always has sore ankles. "The rest is easy. Watch one change sometime and see how slick he does it. He kind of softens his skull, and part of it flows forward and part of it flows back. Then he lets his eyes roll around to the sides of his head. He sharpens his muzzle and does all the other little things. Then he goes down on all fours just like he was unhinging himself. He begins to shiver: that's the way he brings the hair out of his hide. After that he lacks just one thing for him to be a total wolf." Well, someone had to ask it. "What's the one thing he needs to make himself into a total wolf," Pidgeon asked, "after he has gone down on all fours and shivered his hair to the outside of his hide?" "The tail," said Corbey, and licked his lips. "It sounds like a cork popping when he brings it out. The tail's the last thing to go back in too. And after he changes quite a few times, man to wolf and wolf to man, why his tail gets where it won't go all the ways back in anymore. I maintain, Sheriff, that there's a way to put this knowledge to test." What was Corbey getting at? There was dark lightning bouncing around that store. There was musky excitement beginning to rise, and the feeling got riper by the minute. Something was brewing, and it was these

fellows' kind of thing. "Men, this becomes a community effort," Corbey was crowing. "Sheriff, we got to get every man-jack in the neighborhood together and make them strip. Sheriff, one of those men is going to have a tail!" Coruscating coon dogs! Was Corbey kidding? Dammit, would the laughter never come? What was holding off the howling glee? One or two of them may have quaked a bit, but they would not be caught in open laughter. They were all long-faced and serious. "Sheriff, I believe that it's your duty to set the example," Ragley gruffed. "Drop your pants, Sheriff!" Boston barked. "We'll have first look at you." Were these men serious? They looked murderous in their intensity. "I'll not be first," Pidgeon said. "I stand on privilege. I'll be last." "Nobody leaves alive till he's been examined and certified," storekeeper Scroggins stated harshly, and he produced a long gun from behind his counter. "Who'll be number one, do the manly thing, and prove he's not the wolf?" "By damn I will!" Ragley swore. Ragley was never a backward man. He dropped his pants. The examination was thorough and minute. Clothed or stripped, Ragley was curiously shaped, awkwardly articulated, sometimes coming to points or knobs. But he didn't have a tail. "You, boy," Scroggins called to an eleven-year-old who looked in. "This is a man's meeting for men only. Boy, go out and round up every man in the neighborhood. Tell them to come to the store and be examined right now." "Whaffor?" "Tell them that we're going to nail down the wolf. Tell them, boy, that we're going to find out which one of them wears the tail." The boy left running. Boston dropped his pants. No tail. Then it was like a dam bursting the way the pants and overalls came down in a sudden flood. The new men were already coming in. There must have been thirty of the finest men in Royal Parish who dropped their pants within thirty seconds. Tadler, one of the prime inspectors, was near-sighted and he had to get very close to the work. But he was conscientious and he never left a man till he was sure. No tail in the lot. Ribaul came in. "Ribaul, have you a tail?" Scroggins thundered at him, gun in hands. "No. I never learned how to grow one." But Ribaul submitted when it was explained to him. He didn't have a tail either. "And now you, Sheriff Pidgeon," Scroggins said in his gun-barrel voice. "This isn't happening. This can't be happening," Pidgeon moaned. But Pidgeon submitted, in that most shameful moment of his life. And, to the disappointment of many, he didn't have a tail either. He'd made all the fuss over nothing. "And what are you waiting for?" Ragley asked the big

Frenchman who was standing there. It was the man with the funny eyes and the white blaze on his head, the man Jules Lamotte. "For tobacco, salt, coffee, rubbing alcohol, nails, several things," big Lamotte said. "I've no more time. Your games should be finished by now." "How about some mutton, Frenchy?" storekeeper Scroggins asked. "No. I have plenty of mutton," Lamotte said. Scroggins, the gun under his arms, filled the Frenchman's order from a written list. "Why don't you drop your pants like an honest man, Frenchy?" Ragley asked. "Don't you get the idea? Didn't you hear us and see us?" It was like an explosion the way Lamotte laughed, like a wolf laugh, a laugh with hair on it. There were three big men waiting in the doorway for Lamotte. Pidgeon believed that they were the three men in the picture in Lamotte's kitchen. Lamotte got his things. "What's the rubbing alcohol for?" Ragley asked him. "I have sore ankles," Jules Lamotte said quietly, "always sore ankles." Lamotte left them there, going out with his high-gaited walk. And if he had a tail, it was still in his pants when he left. "He's your man, Sheriff," Kenrad said. "He's your wolf." Pidgeon looked after Lamotte. Then he was startled. Lamotte was walking alone. The three men were not with him, and there was nowhere they could have gone.

Pidgeon walked out. A ways further on, he met and spoke briefly with Clela Ragley, the young daughter of rough Ragley himself. She had an idea about using a wolf bait. Pidgeon went on about other things. He would solve this yet. After you've been a fool a couple of times, it gets easier. So he made a fool of himself again after dark.

Pidgeon met Clela Ragley by the road in the dark that night. She went into that rough double section of land that seemed to be the hold of the wolf. And Pidgeon followed her at about fifty yards. And the wolf was there. Turpented tomcats, how he was there! The whole air was full of the wolf. Pidgeon was downwind of it, and now he moved to full windward of the wolf. It was very near, and Clela was upwind of it. She waited in the clear, and Pidgeon watched what would happen. He had a rifle cradled in his elbow, and he wondered what he would do if it was a man and not a wolf that they flushed. Pidgeon again had the feeling that the setting was contrived, that the wolf was announcing his presence as powerfully as possible. Whom was baiting whom here? The wolf came out of the rocks and moved towards Clela. There was confusion as the animal seemed to have three shadows following it. Pidgeon could see its

shagginess before he could make out its form. There was the feel of menace, of murder in the making. Pidgeon caught the white blaze on the head of it before he could make out much else. It erected itself curiously, and so did its three shadows. And Pidgeon was quite surprised to see that it was now a man on two legs, though losing none of its fierceness or shagginess. It was the wolfish Jules Lamotte with a rifle on his arm. Oh, and that white blaze on his head! Pidgeon slipped his own rifle onto ready as he heard the sudden rough voice of Jules. He watched Clela put her hand to her mouth and totter, trembling like a staked-out lamb. He'd kill Lamotte if he touched the girl. Man or wolf, he'd kill him! Lamotte came within a foot of the girl, and Pidgeon could see Clela's eyes widen to great balls of white. Then suddenly the fire was banked and the storm died. "This is a very rough place to be at night, young lady," Lamotte said in a tight voice. "Your father wouldn't care if you were abroad here, but you should care. I all but shot you. I might not have made sure. Walk on down the road, young girl, and then follow it to your home. I'll keep watch on you as you go. Ah, but I see that I'm not needed in this. Is it not the sheriff who slips up so clumsy and heavy-footed behind me?" "I'm the sheriff, Lamotte," Pidgeon said. "And what are you doing here?" "Walking on my own land. That's all you need to know. Why are you here?" Lamotte seemed to have invisible or shadowy supporters with him. Not to be seen now, though, and not certainly to be smelled either as men or wolves. Present to extra senses or to imaginations. "I'm hunting a wolf-man," Pidgeon said. "I came near to killing you for him. It mightn't have been a mistake if I'd done it." "And I also lacked only a little of killing," Lamotte said, "and you interrupted me. Yes, you were very close to the wolf-man, Sheriff. So was I. But this time it was you and the girl who nudged my elbow and prevented my shooting. Why do you hunt with an agneau?" "With what?" "With a little lamb staked out. Is that how you hunt a wolf-man?"

On the next day there came new evidence against Jules Lamotte. Ribaul brought Madelon Lamotte to Sheriff Pidgeon. "Mr. Pidgeon, Mr. Pidgeon!" Ribaul called from outside. Ribaul never knocked. He followed the country custom of standing in front of a house and calling out. Pidgeon opened the door to them. "I'm here. Come in," he said. "I will leave her with you," Ribaul said, and he left. "It is only to talk to you a little," Madelon spoke when she was inside. She was very fair for a

country woman, and her hair was the color of polished walnut. "I hope that you can tell me something to clear things up," Pidgeon said. "No. What I tell will clear nothing up. It will tie it all in knots like snakes. It is possible that I am mad, Sheriff. If that is so, then lock me up at once. Better to be locked up than torn to pieces. Better to be a mad woman than a dead one. But I am selfish: it is of my husband that I must think. For myself I no longer care if I am mad, or even if I am dead. It is the wolf in everything. Everything that I eat or drink has the wolf in it. I see it everywhere, I see it in our yard and house. But wait! Before I speak more, promise that you will not kill him." "Not kill the wolf?" "Not kill my husband Jules. Promise that you will not kill him." "I promise nothing. Tell me what you came to tell." "I see the wolf in our yard. I scream for my husband. When he comes, the wolf is gone, and he says that I only imagine it. Then I see it again and I say 'Look, Jules, look!' But then my husband is gone." "They are never both there at once?" "Never. And Jules says that he does not see the wolf at all, but I see it a dozen times. Jules goes out at night. Oh, if I only know where he goes! Then I begin to smell the wolf, strongly and all the time. And in my own house! Yesterday I come on the wolf face to face in my own house, in the room that we call the cool pantry. I screamed, I ran to my own room, I blocked the door with a trunk. I lay on the bed in terror. I am a country woman. I have seen wolves. Another wolf I would chase like a big dog. This is not like another wolf. I hear it pant at my door. I hear its feet go back and forth. Its teeth scrape the balks of the door and they seem to splinter and tear. Then I feel a change as if it is two things at once. "Then it opened the door as if the trunk against it was a toy. It opened the door and came in. It stood at my bed, and I am too frightened even to open my eyes. 'My poor Madelon,' said my husband Jules, for he was the one standing there. 'What has frightened you? Have you dreamed of the wolf again?' "He is there, my husband, and there is no wolf. 'I have seen him, Jules, in this very house,' I say. 'You know that is impossible,' Jules tells me, and he comforts me. But as I looked I saw something, and I froze. His left hand was only becoming a hand again. The claws were going back in and the fingers were coming out. The heaviest part of the hair was disappearing. It had not been a hand a moment before. Is that possible?" "No. That is not possible," Pidgeon said. But what was possible? "Mrs. Lamotte, are you afraid of your husband?" "Not when he is my husband. Only when he



is the wolf.” “Go back and stay with him today and tonight. Tell him not to leave his house at all for any reason. If the wolf shows in the open tonight, we will kill it. And if the cornered wolf turns into a man, we will still kill it.” She left then. She still had her bearing and her beauty, for all her distraught state. Pidgeon had wanted to ask her one more thing. But how do you go about asking a woman whether her husband has a tail? A little later in the day, Clela Ragley came to the sheriff. “I have proof now for sure,” she said. “Jules Lamotte is the wolf.” “Have you really anything to go on? Anything tangible?” “I think he got pretty tangible with me. I dreamed of the wolf and the man just before dawn this morning. It was a real liver-twister of a dream. He was Jules the man and he came at me. Then he was Jules the wolf as he closed in. He fastened on my shoulder with those terrible teeth, and I only awakened in time or I would have been done to death by him.” “Clela, you half-pint witch! Won’t you ever grow up! I want tangible evidence.” “Is this what you call tangible?” she asked. She showed it to him with a sudden motion, and it set him to shaking. He wasn’t sure whether it was Clela herself who had this effect on him, or the horrible wounds. She’d been bitten and mauled pretty badly where she dropped her sack dress off her shoulders. They were deep, tearing bites that had gone livid, two of one sort and one of another. They could be deadly. “Clela, where did you get those?” Pidgeon asked in amazement. “I told you,” she said. Pidgeon wouldn’t accept it. He’d close his ears and not hear such stuff. Clela was talking some more, but he only heard the end of it. “After you kill him, Sheriff,” she said, “then cut off his head and bring it here and see if it doesn’t match the bites. That way we can be sure.” The wolf had struck again the night before and many sheep were missing. So it had to be the wolf hunt all the way now. “Why do you cut those funny notches into the lead part of your bullets?” Ribaul asked Pidgeon before they started out.

“So I’ll know which shots I shot,” Pidgeon said. “I want to be clear on that.” They went after the wolf as night came on, four of them in one bunch, Ribaul, Ragley, Pidgeon and Kenrad. These four men could track. They knew the country, and they knew animals. “I hear, Ribaul, that you were once with a carnival,” Ragley said as they went along in loose skirmish. “I hear that they paid to see you and thought you were a new kind of animal.” “Were you with a carnival, Ribaul?” Pidgeon asked. “How did Ragley know?” “I was with a carnival. I was not on exhibit. I

worked. I cared for animals. I had a tame bobcat and a tame coon and a tame bear.” “Did you have a tame wolf?” Ragley asked. “No. There is no such thing as a tame wolf.” “Why are you carrying the stake and the maul, Ribaul?” Kenrad asked. “Are they your idea, or the sheriff’s?” “What matter? He says it doesn’t hurt to have them, so long as I’m the one to carry them.” “You’ll have to catch the wolf, Ribaul, before you can kill him with those.” “They are not to kill the wolf with. They are to make him stay dead.” The wolf was there all right, in a general area. For a long time it did not seem to move at all. It waited for them to come. Then, as though by sudden decision, it began to move. So did the men, with absolute sureness now. They hunted without dogs, and they were quickly onto the wolf much closer than they could have got with dogs. They had the wolf boxed into the same rough double section of land where Pidgeon and Ribaul had hunted him before. They had him in the poke, and there was nothing left but to pull the drawstring. It was clear moonlight, and they had him. If he had broke to the open, he would have to display himself for an easy shot against the clear hillside. If he stayed in the thicket, they would beat him out. If he holed in anywhere, they would burn him over and dig him out. He was big and dangerous, but they had him tight. The wolf broke to the open hill, and he turned as if at bay. And it was as if three shadows of him turned also. He was as big as a grown puma. He’d go more than two hundred pounds. He actually sparked fire off his raised hackles, as a lynx at bay is said to do. He had his high white blaze and his eyes of a man, and he looked at them with fevered hate. Ribaul and Ragley must have hated to let it go to another. But it was the sheriff’s case, and so it was his shot. Sheriff Pidgeon shot the wolf clearly, right at the edge of that white blaze on the head. And one shot did it. “Now he turn to a man,” Ribaul said. “Watch him turn as he dies. See how he begin to shiver and turn. This will show that he is 1oup-garou.” But he didn’t turn. He’d been a wolf, and he stayed a wolf. “He’s dead,” said Pidgeon. “That lays one ghost, for me at least.” “Here is the maul, here is the stake,” Ribaul said. “Use them, Sheriff.” “You really believe in that, do you, Ribaul?” Pidgeon asked. “That if you drive the stake through the wolf’s heart he’ll stay dead? I believe it.” “Somebody find where that hellish noise is coming from,” Pidgeon sputtered, “and put a stop to it.” There had been an awful wailing going on since the wolf was shot. Pidgeon drove the stake of bois d’arc wood in through the chest of the

wolf at the line just behind and under the front shoulder, so as to go through the heart, or at least to make the fiction of going through the heart. It was a very tough wolf and it took some driving. But the stake had been sharpened as only tough bois d'arc wood can be. Staking the wolf became like an orgasm to all the men. "He'll stay dead now," said Ragley. "Then why doesn't that damned noise stop if the wolf is dead?" Pidgeon asked. The noise was coming from the farmhouse of Jules Lamotte. Pidgeon's feet recognized the approach before his eyes did. They had been less than two hundred yards from the house when Pidgeon had killed the wolf. They went to it. The kitchen door was open and there was a light inside. It was Madelon Lamotte standing in the doorway with her hair streaming. The hellish noise was her screaming. It went on and on to chill your blood. Pidgeon got there first, white-faced and with a crazy clatter as he caromed off objects in the dark kitchen yard. "Mrs. Lamotte! For the love of God what is wrong? Mrs. —" But Sheriff Pidgeon never finished, nor did he get all the way through the kitchen door. He staggered back with crimsoned vision. He went down crazily and hard. "Killer!" screamed Madelon Lamotte. "Murder my husband! I'll —" Pidgeon had risen dazed and made for the door again, there to be met by a second impact of sound and another shredding blow. It was Madelon who clawed him like a lioness and left a bloody swath as she swung. She had felled him twice. She had nearly taken his head off, and a great part of his face was surely left beneath her fingernails. Ragley and Kenrad had her restrained in some fashion after a while. The screaming fell to a series of splitting sobs. "Now what is this?" Pidgeon demanded. "Hold her, dammit!" He wasn't sure how badly he was injured. He could barely see. "You lick-spit sheriff, you kill my husband!" Madelon howled. "Kill me then, men, but give me two seconds with that white-faced fool first. We see who kill who Ragley had her pinned down then, and Kenrad went deeper into the house to see what had happened. He didn't have to go very deep. "In here, Sheriff," he called then. "In the little room off the kitchen here. It's worse than you think." Pidgeon followed in. Jules Lamotte lay dead in that little earth-floored room off the kitchen that is called the cool pantry. He had been shot in the head, right at the edge of that white blaze that so resembled that of the wolf. What was even more weirdly wrong was that Jules Lamotte had a stake of bois d'arc driven through his chest and into the dirt floor of the little pantry. And Madelon

was still spitting fury in the kitchen. It seemed wild to try to reason with her in her state, but it must be attempted. "Tell me who did this thing, Mrs. Lamotte," Sheriff Pidgeon begged. "You vile pig, you did it! Spitting hypocrite, you killed my husband! Right in that room. Just minutes ago. You shot him, and you drove a stake through his heart. Let me at that sheriff, man!" "I couldn't have," Pidgeon said weakly. "Ragley, hold her! Where is Ribaul all this time?" "But I am right here all this time," Ribaul banged out the words. "Here, let me hold her. I have a way with wild animals. She'll not get loose from me." Back in the cool pantry Pidgeon swooped down on dead Jules Lamotte and began to do a thing that was illegal, outrageous, really mad. Kenrad and Ragley tried to stop him, but he was not to be stopped. Working feverishly he began to cut into the starred head of Lamotte with a jackknife. He went in after the shot that had killed the man. He grasped a meat cleaver from the pantry wall and used it as a pry and wedge. The shot had spent itself in smashing through the bone at an angle and was barely inside the brain case. Pidgeon brought it out and held it in his hand. "It's my shot," Pidgeon said. "I marked my shots before starting out tonight. I wanted to be certain of what ones I shot." "Well, then, it's certain that you shot this one," Ragley said. "It's certain that you killed Jules Lamotte." Pidgeon left the Lamotte farmhouse and took Ragley and Kenrad back to the wolf-kill site. Pidgeon wandered back and forth, and the other two looked at him puzzled. "What are we looking for?" Ragley asked. "For the spot where the wolf was killed!" Pidgeon said wildly. "We're standing on the spot, Sheriff. Those are the scuff marks. There's the hole where your stake went through the wolf and into the ground. Wipe the blood out of your eyes, Sheriff. She near took your eyes out with her claws." "Sheriff, are you crazy?" Ragley asked. "You saw Lamotte dead. How could the wolf be here and he there? Lamotte was the wolf. Lamotte is the dead wolf now." "No. A wolf is a wolf and a man is a man," Pidgeon insisted. "There has to be a dead wolf around here somewhere." "You can find out tomorrow, Sheriff," Ragley said. "It's going to be another hot one tomorrow. Give that sun seven or eight hours on this rock pasture, and you can find the wolf if he is here. The buzzards will be turning in the air over him and shuttling down on him. A dead wolf would get real ripe in the sun if he was here. But he isn't. We all know who killed the wolf and the man with the same shot. Let's call it a night."

Well, a man had been shot to death, and Pidgeon himself was Pidgeon's only suspect. But why, leaving the unnatural stories out of it, should anyone want to kill Jules Lamotte? Possibly for his gold coins. Likely Lamotte hadn't any gold coins, but one of the stories was that he had piles of them somewhere. Or possibly for his more-than-handsome wife. Since he'd seen her in a fury, Pidgeon had known that Madelon might have enough fire in her to draw a man to murder. Or Lamotte could have been killed because he was really stealing the farmers' sheep. But there were wild elements left over from all these motives. Why couldn't Lamotte have been killed in a rational manner? "Where is the wolf?" Pidgeon quizzed himself. "Where is my maul that drove the stake or stakes. Why was only one of my marked bullets shot? Oh, I remember the maul now." They had told Pidgeon that his maul, overlooked at first, had been found on the earth floor of the cool pantry in Lamotte's farmhouse, right beside dead Lamotte. In the hot afternoon of the new day Pidgeon went to check on the buzzards. The sun should have done its work. The wolf, if he still lay in the rocky pasture, would be ripe. There were a couple of buzzards wheeling near where it should be. Not quite near enough though. They seemed rather to be above the Lamotte farmstead. There were two of the buzzards in the air and two of them down on the eaves of a low shed not ten feet off the Lamotte kitchen. They were gazing with mournful intensity at that near part of the house called the cool pantry where Jules Lamotte (not yet removed, for the wheels turn slowly there) lay dead.

There was a strong wolf scent and man scent mixed. Ragley had said, "Lamotte is the dead wolf now." Was Lamotte right? Ragley, Scroggins, and several other men came out of the Lamotte house. Pidgeon knew that Scroggins was acting in his office of coroner, and that the others had been acting as sworn witnesses. "Pidgeon, I'm glad you're here," Scroggins cried. "We've decided that it would be best if you arrested yourself for the murder of Jules Lamotte and then appointed an interim sheriff to handle things." "No. I won't do it," Pidgeon said. "We decided that it would be next best if we sent for the nearest other sheriff to come and arrest you. Who would he be?" "Sheriff Bartholdy across the river in Calvados Parish. I think I will go and have a talk with him right now." Pidgeon went across the river to Calvados Parish. He went to the house of Bartholdy, walked in, and found the man. Sheriff Bartholdy gestured a welcome. Then he

left the room. He came back with two bottles of white wine, a can of worms, a pail of minnows, and two fishing poles. He carried them all out to Pidgeon's pickup. The two men loaded in, and Pidgeon drove to a good spot on the red banks of the Red River. They fished there. "I don't know whether you have heard of it, but there is a puzzling little murder up in my district," Pidgeon said finally. "Take your line out of the water," Sheriff Bartholdy said. "No man can pay attention to two things at once. Have a drink of the white wine. It loosens the wits. Tell me about it. Who was murdered?" Pidgeon told about Jules Lamotte being murdered. Bartholdy knew Lamotte from of old. Pidgeon told about the nightmarish coincidences, loup-garou stories, wolf tracks, sheep kills, tail hunts, young wife tales, marked bullets, a rifle shot and a stake through a wolf, a shot man and a stake through the man, various things. "It that all?" Bartholdy asked then. "What is the puzzling aspect that you mentioned? Why do you not simply arrest the two murderers?" "But eveiything is puzzling about it, Bartholdy!" Pidgeon screeched. "There's the dead man that I couldn't have shot. The stake through his heart that I couldn't have driven. My own marked bullet in his head. Being French, you would be superstitious. So I thought that you might understand about the unearthly aspects of the case. The werewolf stuff, I mean, and all that, and the wolf turning into a man." "Are you out of your mind, Pidgeon? I never heard such nonsense." "I tell you that there was a wolf. And there was the man." "I don't mean that. You said 'Being French, you would be superstitious.' You'd have to be out of your mind to say a thing like that. There can no more be a superstitious Frenchman than there can be dry water or green horses. Think about the implications of that for a long time. Then your little problems will have solved itself." Pidgeon thought about the implications for quite a while. "Not a bit superstitious, Bartholdy?" he asked once. "Not a bit?" "Not a bit," said Bartholdy. "There can be stupid Frenchmen. There can be Frenchmen who rustle sheep. There can be Frenchmen who love other men's wives. There can be evil Frenchmen. But there cannot be superstitious Frenchmen." "If that's so, then I don't live in the same sort of world as I'd supposed." "No, not quite the same sort, Pidgeon." Pidgeon thought about the implications some more. Then he rose with a sigh. "I never like these things," he said, "but I guess I'd better go make the arrests." So sheriff Otis Pidgeon drove back to Royal Parish and arrested Ribaul and Madelon Lamotte for the

murder of Jules Lamotte.

“How’d you figure it out, Pidgeon?” Ragley asked as Pidgeon and Ragley and Clela Ragley walked over the rock pasture of the events area. “Checked perfect, did it?” “All but the three shadows,” said Pidgeon. “There were always three shadows of the wolf, and of Lamotte. I don’t understand them. As to the rest, well here’s how I did it. There were a pair of those folks who thought we were easily foxed up here. And because they thought so, they will hang for it. Who was it, I asked, who was clear enough of superstition to use superstition on us? It had to be French folks. You see, Ragley, the French aren’t superstitious. But we are.” “Sure we are. How’s a redneck going to get any savor in his life if he doesn’t spice it up with superstition? The French now, they use garlic instead. Yeah, I can see how they don’t have to be superstitious.” “So, Ragley, when everything points to something happening that simply could not happen, then I ask ‘Who’s trying to make it seem like it happened?’ So I pick out stories that will make a lot of things come clear if the stories are lies.” “Whose stories are that?” Ragley asked. “Those of Madelon Lamotte. And those of Ribaul.” “She tell you some rousers, Sheriff?” “She told me a couple of rousers, so convincingly that —” “I always said it was a mistake for a young man to be sheriff,” thirteen-year-old Clela said. “They’re too easy taken in by fancy women.” “So I go back a little, Ragley; I asked myself who it was that started all those werewolf stories in the first place? Ribaul, that’s who. And Madelon fed kindling to the fire. I myself saw wolf prints turn into man prints, but who was it made me see them?” “How did Ribaul do the tracks, Pidgeon? That’s a stumbler.” “I don’t know. He just grins (with his neck in a noose he grins) and says ‘A trick, Mr. Pidgeon, a trick.’ But with a tame wolf under his control, and husky as he is, he could have leaped down into the draw and had it jump onto his shoulder, or some such. Those tracks were made earlier, when it was still wetter in the draw; it was Ribaul who made me believe that they were more recent or immediate. And Ribaul’s old shack was on Lamotte’s rough land right near. He kept the wolf there. No wonder that wolf smell always came on so strong when we were near it. It was Ribaul all the way, that old carnival faker who tamed animals. He said that a wolf couldn’t be tamed, but he lied.” “But Sheriff, Ribaul isn’t smart enough to put all that together.” “He isn’t. Madelon is. Ribaul had a tame wolf, but Ribaul was the tame wolf of Madelon Lamotte. He

followed Madelon and Jules up from south of the river last year and conspired with Madelon to kill Jules. Madelon wanted the younger Ribaul, and Ribaul wanted the farm and money and Madelon. Ribaul was doing a pretty good business in shot sheep while he set the trap for Jules and for the town of Yellow Knife. To rub it in, he hauled the shot sheep in Lamotte's old truck, and all the suspicion fell on Jules. He gave Madelon at least two shot sheep, and she wouldn't tell Jules where she got them. But that was when Jules started to go man-hunting at night. The wolf took out the throat of at least one sheep at every place, and ate a little sheep shoulder." "When did Ribaul shoot Jules?" "It was Madelon who shot her husband, in bed. Then she dressed him and carried him to the cool pantry." "How was it done with your marked bullet?" "Ribaul was my helper and had access to my things. He saw me marking the lead shots. He marked one as close to mine as he could, and he substituted it for one of mine. I can tell now, though barely, the one that has his notch instead of mine on it." "How about the stake?" "Ribaul cut two bois d'arc stakes as near as possible alike. He gave one to Madelon when he gave her the marked bullet to use. The maul marks don't mean anything. Some one made me see maul marks clearer than they were. Bois d'arc splinters a little bit, but it doesn't take a good mark. The blaze on the wolf's head was a fake. Ribaul had to put it on fresh every time he let the wolf out, but he had sure to look like Lamotte's blaze. And every wolf looks at you with man's eyes. Notice it next time you trap a wolf. It startles us every time we see it, and then we forget. I had already told Ribaul that I intended to shoot the wolf right on the edge of the blaze, and he knows I'm a good shot. Madelon didn't have to be a very good shot to shoot Jules in the same place at very short range. Madelon was listening for my shot, and she set up that screaming to draw us to the house and away from the wolf, so Ribaul could get it out of the way." "When did you find out that the wolf was in that shed not ten feet from dead Jules?" "Damn, I keep seeing three shadows following us even now. It can't be all imagination. Oh, I found that out quite late. I should have known it this noon when I saw the buzzards perched on the eaves. There was the smell of ripe man and ripe wolf together, but I thought it was werewolf." "Sheriff, why did Lamotte really use so much rubbing alcohol?" "Like he said, he had sore ankles. But not from turning into a wolf. I believe that Corbey's account of how a man turns into a wolf was borrowed from a Ribaul account. And



Ribaul already knew that Jules had sore ankles.”

“Then that’s all of it, except for the three shadows.” “Yes. But I can’t solve the shadows of the wolf, or the shadows of Jules Lamotte. Madelon says that Jules didn’t have any brothers or kindred, that there were no such three men visiting him or in the neighborhood at all. She says there was no such picture on their kitchen wall. Well, it isn’t there now, and I can’t find it. But there’s one other loose end, and either you or your daughter here knows the answer. Clela, where did you get those horrible fang marks?”

“I told you once. Say, why don’t you cut off Jules’ head and bring it to me? Then we’ll see whether the teeth match the teeth marks. Cut off the wolf’s head and bring it too. I like to have a lot of heads rolling around.” “Oh, that, Sheriff. Well, Clela here is a violent young girl and she is sometimes plagued by a personal sort of spooks,” Ragley said. “Most such spooks just pinch kids and leave them black and blue, but Clela is more violent and she has more violent spooks. The particular devils that haunt her slash her up pretty bad sometimes. It happens to all the women Of our family. She’ll outgrow it in a year or two. They all do.” “Ragley, you are a prize liar, but sometimes —” “But sometimes you can’t be sure that I’m lying? And you never can be sure when Clela is. Let’s leave it like that.” “Oh, it’s real,” Clela said. “Like your three shadows. They’re real too.” Ragley and Clela, both laughing, left the sheriff then and turned towards their own place. And Sheriff Pidgeon walked alone for a very little while. Then there were three bristly men walking with him. Pidgeon was nervous at the sight of them. “What are you three men doing here?” Pidgeon asked them. “When did you come back?” “We came for the burial of our brother Jules,” one of the men said. “But you weren’t at the service. And you weren’t at the graveside.” “Yes. We were both places.” “Madelon says that there are not any three such men as you,” Pidgeon said, trying to make them not be. “Madelon is only at this minute dead in your jail,” said the spokesman of the three, “with man bites and with wolf bites in her throat. She dies for that lie, and for other things. We will not be disowned.” One of the men unhinged himself and went down. He turned rapidly. Yes, the account was true. The tail came last of all, and it popped like a cork when it came out. Pidgeon continued to feel very nervous as he walked with two strange men and one strange wolf in the shaggy daylight of Jules Lamotte’s rock meadow. “You are the pieces left over,” Pidgeon

said. “Ribaul explained most of the details, but he didn’t explain you. He said he didn’t believe in your sort of shadows.” “Ribaul is at this minute dead in your jail also, man-bit and wolf-bit. He dies for his unbelief, and for other things.” “For what other things?” Pidgeon asked with a little bit of boldness. “For knowing too much, and for not knowing enough,” the spokesman said. Another man unhinged himself and went down. He turned quickly. Yes, there was a terrible stretching of the ankle bones. Yes, he shivered his wolf’s hair to the outside of his hide with convulsive movements. Yes, the tail came out last of all. Pidgeon was shaking like a quicken tree as he walked with one strange man and two strange wolves. “Ah, I turn off here,” Pidgeon said. “I have some business in this other direction.” “Turn off as much as you will,” the man said, “but your feet will continue on course with us.” And Pidgeon’s feet did continue on the course with the man and the wolves. Then he knew that it was all over with him. “Why?” he asked. “Why me?” “As with Ribaul, you know too much and not enough. And we like to work by threes.” “Well, then, how will you do it, as man or as wolf?” Pidgeon demanded shaking. And his feet wouldn’t run. “Ah, they’ll find two gashes of one sort and one of another on you,” the man said, and he fastened into Pidgeon’s throat with long and tearing teeth. Pidgeon was down on the ground then, and the two wolves had moved onto him to consummate the work. The last bristly man, streaming with Pidgeon’s blood, unhinged himself and went down. And turned, Pidgeon watched the turning listlessly as his death closed in on him. The terrible lengthening of the ankle bones, the softening of the skull with one part of it flowing forward and another part of it flowing backward, the eyes rolling around to the sides of the head, the shivering that brings the wolf hair to the outside, everything that marks the transition from man to beast! And then there was only one thing needed for that third of the shadow-persons to turn himself into a total wolf. But Pidgeon’s vision and life were interfered with, and he never did get to see the tail appear.

For All Poor Folks at Picketwire

“We ought to have a bigger place for the children to play in the summertime,” Lemuel said one day. “How many do we have now?” Lemuel was a bent young man with bright and slightly peering eyes.

“Five, Lem, five,” Griselda said. This Griselda was something of a looker.

If Lemuel Windfall hadn't always seen so far ahead, he might have been one of the very top inventors of the world. But isn't foresight a good quality in an inventor or in anyone?

Sure it is, but it's not good if you rub it into the ground. It is possible to be too foresightly. Lemuel could see ahead both into the immediate and to the ultimate use of whatever gadget he might devise. And he could pretty well weigh it out in green money how much it could be turned for. It would have been wonderful if he'd let it go at that; if he'd gathered each harvest in as it came to season, and had put his bills of expectation on their proper spindle till they had realized themselves. But Lemuel always saw forward, past the use and application of a device. He saw forward to its obsolescence. And what is the use to activate a device or a potential or a condition if it is going to be obsolete in a decade or two?

"For the money, that's what's the use," the wife, Griselda, would say. "We can use the money right now, and I don't care whether it will be obsoleted next century."

"But why should we be bothered for money?" Lemuel would always ask. "Surely it's always an advantage in any circumstance to reduce the number of moving parts, and money in this life is made up entirely of moving parts. And didn't I invent instant money just a fortnight ago?"

"Indeed you did, Lem," good Griselda said, "but you didn't go into production on the stuff. You looked into the future, and you discovered that it would be a short-term (not over fifty years' duration) affair. You said that ethical backlash and other difficulties would blow the whistle on it by then. Look, Lem, I'm reasonable. I'm not even asking for instant money today. I'll settle for thirty-minute money. I'll give you just thirty minutes to raise some household cash, and that's the limit. Thirty minutes, Lem. Did you hear me?"

"Yes," he would always say. Then he would put a few working drawings of something under his arm and would go down the street to Conglomerate Enterprises or Wheeler-Heelers and sell them for whatever he could get in thirty minutes.

"I could get more for things if I had the time and fare to take them to Le Conglomerat in Paris," Lem would say wistfully. "They've written me that they'll pay well for any new thing of mine, and they say that their offer will stand forever, for a reasonable ever. I could always get more if I had fifteen years to deal instead of thirty minutes."

“Lem, everything that you’ve ever sold, you’ve already had it on the shelf for at least fifteen years.” Griselda would say with weary patience.

“Yes, I guess so,” Lem would admit.

“And remember that you’ve promised me a trip to Paris.”

“Yes, and I’ll give it to you yet, Grissie.”

And there was a worse hitch in the Lemuel mental and fabricatory process. He didn’t like to produce anything unless working conditions were just right. And he had the sad conviction that nowhere in the world were conditions ever just right.

“I should have a workshop that’s in a total vacuum,” he would say sometimes. “That’s the least of the conditions.”

“You should have your head in a total vacuum,” Griselda would counter.

“Why, such a thing would implode my brains,” Lem would state, “and what would be the compensating advantage?”

“You never know, dear. There might be useful side effects.”

“Yes, I should have a workshop in a total vacuum,” he’d dream and beam, “and dust free, and in a place completely without gravity. And it should be without the quality of temperature; neither medium, nor very high, nor very low temperature will serve; it must be without even the idea of temperature. And it should be beyond the power of hard radiation of every sort, beyond the fury of excessive ultraviolet rays or actinic rays or triatomic oxygen. ‘And all baleful beams,’ as the psalmist says. And my place of enterprise should be beyond the temporal cloud, and I do not mean anything so simple as time-stand-still, no, nor eternity either. There must not be duration; there must be only moment. No duration is ever long enough to get anything done.

“And my workshop should be spared the effect of every magnetic field, of every voltage differential, of every solar wind. And it should not have any topography at all. Perhaps it shouldn’t even have location, or shape, or size. Griselda, if I had a workshop or factory so situated and appointed, all processes would become easy, and there would be scarce a limit to what might be achieved. Hey, I could make coal then! Oh, but there’s plenty of coal. But in this little workshop here, and in the bigger workshop whose name is World, with all their disabilities of gravity and magnetism and electrical field, and baleful rays and temperature and existence in time and space, and subject to indexing as to shape and size

and color and aroma, why, it just doesn't seem worthwhile even to try any work here."

"But, Lem, if you hadn't gone tilt-brained and thought up all these objections, then you could believe that you had the finest place in the world, and you could do the finest work anywhere. Say, there's a title to a piece of land in Colorado that came in the mail today. A Mr. Jasher Halfhogan sent it to you. As far as I can tell, the little piece of land is on a small creek named Picketwire, and there isn't any town near it anywhere."

"What? What? Oh, how fortuitous can it get!" Lemuel cried with real enthusiasm. "On Picketwire Creek in Colorado, you say? Why, that's almost the same thing as having no topography at all. Nuggets of gold and orichalcum on my head! I guess that this is just my lucky day."

"But shouldn't this man have sent you money instead of a title to a no-good piece of land?"

"Of course he should have, Griselda. What luck he didn't! He should have sent me a great lot of money, and I suppose that there are persons who would prefer money. Oh, this is lucky! There is bound to be advantage come of it. One of the requirements of the ideal working place is that it should be unlocated and of no value. May the years teach me enough wisdom to find advantage in this thing! And in the meanwhile, it might be a nice place to turn the children loose in the summertime. How many of them do we have now?"

"Six, Lem, six. They are six of the reasons that I'm often after you for money. And remember that you've promised me a trip to Paris. That takes money too."

In a different year Griselda said, "Do you know how much taxes we got a bill for on that stupid piece of land in Colorado, Lem? Eighty-five cents. It must be some place."

"It makes one feel cheap, doesn't it, Grissie? I'll see what I can do about getting the taxes raised. Jasher Halfhogan goes out there pretty often. I guess that I should find out a little bit more about that piece of property."

"I guess that I should find out a little bit more about that man Jasher Halfhogan," Griselda said. "He has some kind of hook into you. Jasher Halfhogan sounds like a name that you'd invent. And that funny-looking old man looks like someone you'd invent too. I'm asking you seriously

Lem: did you?"

"No, not consciously I didn't invent him, Grissie. And yet I did invent him a little bit, I suppose. And he me. We are all formed by feedback and interaction. We see more than there is in other people, and we ourselves are seen for more than we are. And we grow to match our seeming. Don't you like Jasher?"

"I've never met him, Lem. Every time I've seen him he was scurrying away like some night ghost that was afraid of being shone on by sunlight. Well, if he's a Halfhogan, what would a Wholehogan be?"

"You really don't know, Griselda? Sometimes you astonish me," Lemuel said. He was a bent man who had recently slipped into middle age without much noise. "But as to the Colorado land, Jasher says that it's a gateway to a whole new life. It has something to say to me in the future, I know. And meanwhile, it might be a nice place to take the children some summer. How many do we have now?"

"Seven, Lem, seven." Somehow Griselda had remained one of the really good-lookers.

There finally came a year when Lemuel thrived in his erratic discoveries and enterprises in spite of his being forced to work and invent in places and circumstances of matter and atmosphere and gravity and magnetism and electrical manifestation and temperature and baleful rays and time and space and shape. Money seemed approximately sufficient. But always Griselda had something to worry about.

"I won't say that I don't like your friend Jasher Halfhogan," she said once. "I'm sure that he means well. I have met him now, you know, just a few years ago. Once, I believe, I saw him attempt a smile. It didn't work. But I do believe that he's a bad omen for you, Lem. A little buzzard recently whispered to me that he'll be the death of you yet."

"No, he'll not cause my death, Grissie," Lemuel said seriously. "Though the neighborhood children of whatever age hoot at him and call him Mr. Deathman and Mr. Soul Broker, yet I believe that they misunderstand his role. He will not cause my death. 'Twill be a mere synchronicity. He wants me to locate by that entrance in Colorado some year soon, to go to that little property of ours. That's one of the entrances to the next step in living, he says. And it would be nice to visit it, Grissie, before we die, or soon after that, in any case. And it might be pleasant to take the children there for a little vacation. How many do we have now?"

“Eight, Lem, but they’re all married and moved away. I believe that it’s too late for us to arrange such a trip together. In the next life, maybe.”

“Maybe so, Grissie. It’s good to think about.” Lem was a bent old man now, and he hadn’t intended to let himself get into such a state. And Griselda was still a good-looker, now and forever. “Colorado seems to loom pretty big in the next life,” Lem was saying. “I’m feeling a bit dodderly lately. I may ask Jasher Halhogan what he thinks about it all.”

So the next season, when Jasher came through town again, Lemuel asked him about several things. “I’d like someday to visit that little Colorado property that you once deeded to me for services rendered,” Lem said. “I have high expectations for it. And I’m reaching the age where I need something of value to concretize my expectations a little.”

“Oh, the property itself is worthless, Lem,” Jasher said. “Don’t set any expectations on its value.”

“But, Jash, you once said that it was a gateway to a whole new life.”

“So I did, and so it is. But even a broken gate that’s not worth half a dollar may be a gateway to a whole new life. It’s the location that’s important. Lem. There are a few other localities equally important, and they all give ingress to the same place. But it would be impossible to put any of them into right context without the services of a special informant such as myself. The place is analogous to a mail drop, Lem, in that it gives communication to places almost without limit. Rather think of it as a world drop or a life drop. It’s better to take these things under guidance and control than to go at random and in ignorance. Besides, I get a commission on you. I work largely on commission.”

“I never did know what you did. Jasher,” Lemuel said. “I’m not one to wonder about a friend’s occupation, but my wife often speculates out loud about yours. She says that you’ll be the death of me yet.”

“No death is foreordained, Lem. I’ll collect a fee on yours when it does happen. but that’s only because you’re in my territory. Lemuel, do you have any particular later life desires or aspirations? We may be able to do something about them.”

“Oh, yes. And what desires I have left do seem to get a little bit stronger with age. In particular, I’ve always believed that I could accomplish things almost without limit if I had the proper working conditions for discovering and processing and manufacturing. I have found, Jasher, quite a few things that had to have been fabricated in more

nearly ideal circumstances than are found on Earth. Or at least they had to be patterned and triggered in more favorable circumstances. These things have been passed off by most persons as natural or quasi-natural phenomena. But they're not natural. I know manufactured things when I see them, and many of these things are manufactured. Aye, Jasher, but they're not made under the disabilities that afflict our local planet.

"I want to make such things also. I want to make them in such profusion that they will be mistaken for natural or quasi-natural phenomena. I want to make them so nearly perfect that they will be almost unnoticed in their excellence, and so tremendously large that they will escape scrutiny and stand like invisible and accepted giants. I do not want money or recognition for these services that I am burning to perform. But, Jasher, the sites and circumstances for such doings are simply not to be found on this world."

"It may be that they are to be found with one foot on this world, Lem," Jasher Halfhogan said, "or with one tentacle. The world puts out some very long and tricky tentacles, a few of them so tremendous that they do escape scrutiny. So I will bet that we can find good site and circumstances for your workshop or whatever. Just what specifications do you have in mind for it?"

So Lemuel Windfall explained to Jasher Halfhogan just what he would need for the minimum. And Jasher nodded from time to time and mumbled, "I think so. Yes, I think so." Lem listed the things that he had often poured into the erratic ears of his wife and into the stoppered ears of the world at large. All about the avoidance of atmosphere and magnetism and gravity and baleful rays. "And somehow Griselda must get a trip to Paris out of it," he said.

"You're making it easy for us, Lem," Jasher said. "You're going right down the line with all our specialities. Lem, I know just the place for it. When will you be ready to go?"

"I'd go quickly enough if I knew where I was going and what I'd find," Lemuel stated with the confidence of one who doesn't expect his hand to be called.

"You'll find just the conditions that you have been speaking of, Lem. But can you handle it, or will you go right past the place? I've never been certain that you have enough of the cantankerous metal in you, and without it you'll have too easy a passage to discover these conditions.



Have you the need to be compensating enough that you must create things in such profusion and perfection? For it does go by need, and I simply don't believe that you have a strong enough need in you. Lem, I don't believe that you have been a bad enough man to be called to the extraordinary ransom and prodigy."

"Have I not been bad enough?" Lemuel crooked his voice at Jasher. "Let me tell you about it, low and into your ear here." And Lemuel talked into Jasher's ear in a serious and hushed voice until all the blood was drained out of Jasher's face.

"Stop, stop! Yes, you've been bad enough, Lem," Jasher croaked with distaste. "I was wrong to doubt you. How soon will you be ready to go? It's to your little land in Colorado. It's a better entrance than most places to the whole new circumstance and life."

"I'll be ready to go by nightfall, Jasher," Lemuel said.

And that was almost the last that anyone saw of Lemuel Windfall around the old place. He cashed in his chips, as they say. He lowered his flag, so the colloquialism has it. He had his ticket punched, as the phrase goes. He went West, as the older fellows say. He shipped off to Colorado, as the proverb has it.

His wife, Griselda, put on widow's weeds when he was gone.

She had always been an impatient woman.

2.

More energy has been spent in explaining the presence of coal deposits on our Earth, and more especially in explaining petroleum deposits, than in almost any other thing. Probably more energy has been spent in explaining them than in forming them. But it comes to nothing.

One authority insisted that the carboniferous gluts of our world came from the tails of comets that sideswiped the Earth. And this is one of the most nearly intelligent of all the explanations that have been put forward!

There is one geologist who says that petroleum is formed only between layers of bituminous shale, and that it is formed in such case by great pressure and heat. That is a little like using cheese for the jaws of a vise intended to exert tremendous pressure. Bituminous shale just isn't the rock for the job. And trying to explain the presence of petroleum is child's play compared with trying to explain the presence of bituminous shale.

There is another authority who maintains that petroleum and natural

gas are largely due to the resinous spores of rhizocarps. Savor that opinion for a moment, reader, and you must conclude that there is at least one authority running loose who should be confined.

In every case, the temperatures sufficient to form coal or petroleum are somewhat higher than the temperatures sufficient to vaporize the entire Earth. One exasperated authority stated that all such deposits must have been made by kobolds or gnomes laboring under the roots of mountains. He was righter than he knew. But the question remains: how could any circumstances on Earth serve to trigger such deposits and results? And the answer is an easy one: they couldn't.

-The Back Door of History  
Arpad Arutinov

But there is a condition, neither on Earth nor off it, not in any place, really, where circumstances could trigger such results. This is a condition lacking the quality of location (Jews, close your ears! Greeks, harden your Hearing! Covenanters, avert your senses lest you be affronted by it!), a realm of ransom and recompense and incredible self-assigned labor, a scene where such accumulations of carbonaceous matter are indeed patterned and planned and instigated.

-The Back Door of. History  
Second Revised Edition,  
Arpad Arutinov

There were new cargoes and traffics appearing, new potentials, and circumstances; but it was only Conglomerate Enterprises and Wheeler-Heelers and Le Conglomerat and such like firms that guessed that the new things weren't really natural or even quasi-natural. The new things were manufactured - these canny companies recognized this quickly enough - and they weren't exactly manufactured on this world.

The conditions here just weren't right for them. And, as it seemed to the men of the several discerning firms and conglomerates, the new cargoes and traffics and products had the signature of one man all over them.

To several gentlemen from Conglomerate Enterprises came to visit Griselda Windfall. They had been in the habit of taking advantage of Griselda's husband, Lemuel, and they didn't intend to get out of the habit just because he had left town.

"It is absolutely necessary that we locate your husband, Lemuel

Windfall,” they said in unison (there were three gentlemen).

“It isn’t necessary to me, it isn’t necessary to Lem, and I’m not sure that it’s necessary at all,” Griselda said. “If Lem had wanted to be located, he could have stayed here.”

“He could have what?” the three Conglomerate gentlemen croaked in disbelief in their single voice. “Mrs. Windfall, your husband is making all the new things available free. There are millions of dollars in this if you can help us locate him, or simply tell us where he is, if you know. Then we can work out the double modification, and we will have everything on a paying basis.”

“Millions in it for me, and tens of millions in it for you,” Griselda said thoughtfully. “And what is in it for my husband, Lemuel, who apparently doesn’t want to be found? Please explain to me about the double modification.”

“We will take one example out of dozens,” the three men spoke in their single voice. “Smithstone Clay has become edible, and we believe that Lemuel Windfall has made it so. In nine billion years Smithstone Clay has never been edible before; and now it is. There were previous hints of it, of course. There were clay eaters in assorted boondocks. But real Smithstone Clay has never been found in abundance before. Now it is. And who can say when or how it happened? Who kept a running census of so worthless a thing as Smithstone Clay? But now it is no longer scarce and no longer worthless. That is good.

“But it comes free to everybody. That is bad.

“It would be simple to put a modification into it at the other end, at your husband Lemuel’s end, so that it wouldn’t become edible until we put the countering modification into it at this end. This is the double modification. By this we can control the products or traffics or cargoes or potentials or circumstances. And then we will be able to sell it, for a fair price, to the whole world, instead of having it go free. And people always appreciate a thing more when they have to pay for it.”

“Oh, sure,” Griselda said. “I will think about this, gentlemen. And I will ask Lemuel what to do about it, if I can find him with his ears standing open.

“And, Mrs. Windfall, there arc dozens of other new and advantaged things besides Smithstone Clay,” the three men tried to explain to Griselda in their unity talk.

“I know pretty much what the other new things would be,” she said. “I watch the ripples, and I can guess what innovative rocks are being dropped into the pond. Particularly can I guess them when I’ve heard Lemuel talk about them for fifty years. I will let you know, gentlemen.”

Griselda had a little talk with herself after the gentlemen of Conglomerate had taken their leave.

“My Lem has succumbed to the Devil’s most transparent temptation,” she said. “I wish that he wouldn’t do things like that. He should never wander off from me and do things on his own. He hadn’t left his first childhood, and now he’s fallen into his second. ‘Command that these stones be bread,’ the Devil must have told him. Why is it that nobody sees the heresy of the ‘Feed-the-world-by-easy-device’ proposal any longer? The Devil got Lem in a weak place there. He always had a soft spot in his heart for the Devil, and he always had a soft spot for the ‘Feed-the-world-by-easy-device’ ploy. I’ve told him that the Devil will be the ruin of him yet.”

Griselda went to visit a sibyl in a cave out on the Sand Springs road. It was one of those caves that run back into the bluffs just before you come to Union Street Hill. Once there was a restaurant and nightclub named The Cave in that block. Now the block was known as Sibyls’ Row. There were half a dozen sibyl studios and one brake-lining shop in that block, and one empty cave with a FOR RENT sign.

“I would like your help in locating my husband,” Griselda told the sibyl. “Here is his address.”

“If you have his address, why do you need my help in locating him?” the sibyl asked. “Does he live at the address?”

“Yes, I suppose he does,” Griselda said, “but I don’t. I’m not sure that the address is real. I hardly know how to say this, but there is something very spooky about the place. I believe I could go there - and I intend to - and that my husband would be there. And yet I might not be able to see him or talk to him. And I might not be able to come back. There are things accumulating there. Things were accumulating long before my husband went there to work and live. And other things have been similarly accumulating in other places or in other entrances to the same place, for long ages. I have this information but I don’t know where I have it from.”

“I will give the address to my python,” the sibyl said. “He will get to

the effective level of it.” The sibyl went down into a lower room to give the assignment to the python. And after a while she came back.

“Rats, rats!” she said in an odd voice.

“Is that an expletive?” Griselda asked her.

“Not this time. It’s just that I’m almost out of rats. You know, there isn’t a single rat catcher listed in the phone book this year. Rats and rabbits are what the python eats. You were talking about accumulations Mrs. Windfall. Yes, there have been these most spooky accumulations for ages. For long ages before men appeared, these accumulations are to be found, so the peculiarity of the addresses must go back before mankind. I wonder just who was living at those dubious addresses then. Whatever the species, they had affinity for mining and for well digging: mythology tells us that much about them. They manufactured things by processes that seem impossible. There was always one element missing. I believe that there was bilocation involved. I believe that there still is. Ah, the python has the address analyzed.”

The python’s voice came through a sort of ventilator shaft in man-serpent accents: “The address is at one of the primary interchanges, though physically it is on a small creek in Colorado. The full name of this creek is El Rio de las Animas Arrepentidas en Limbo, or the River of the Compensating Souls in the Borderland of Limes. But the early Spanish people did not name the creek so. With rare intuition, they recognized the site for what it was, and their name was the perfect translation of the primordial name, which is very old. The creek is also called Lost Souls Creek and Picketwire Creek. Sophia, ask the lady whether she happens to have a rat with her.”

“Oh, no, I don’t have,” Griselda said. “I never carry them.”

“Nobody carries them anymore,” the man-serpent complained. “Well, the creek rises at, nay, it falls down from Trinchera Peak in Las Animas County, and it ends in the John Martin Reservoir on the Arkansas River in Bent County. The lower hundred and fifty miles of the creek, from Hoene to the town of Las Animas, does not touch on inhabited region at all.

“The same creek, bearing the name of Las Animas, is also found hundreds of miles distant, in Sierra County, New Mexico. There is some mystery about this bilocation of the creek on Earth, but the fact of the bilocation hasn’t been doubted. It is really a case of multilocation, as it is

with every primary interchange place.

“Ah, there’s lots of words and names welling up out of my depths, and all of them refer to this location. Some of them call it a dislocation; some of them say that it is one of the limbos or halfway places; or a half-mansion. or a half-house.”

“How about a half-hogan?” Griselda asked the educated snake in the room below.

“I don’t know,” the python said. “But what seems to be the trouble? Why don’t you go ahead and visit the place, lady?”

“Yes, I will, I’ll do that.” Griselda said. “Thank you. python. Thank you. sibyl.”

3.

...mineral as well as metal, and that which is now only a name, and was then something more than a name - orichalcum - was dug out of the earth... The red light of orichalcum.

Plato

As Griselda came near the place, she was surprised to find what name the local people called the stream. It was startling; it was a name unbelievably by many; it was ironic.

“Jews, close your ears!” a prairie dog barked.

“Greeks, harden your hearing!” a rattlesnake voiced.

“Covenanters, avert your senses lest you be affronted by it!” a bulibat spoke in a series of little booms.

“What I say is that Lem is lucky to have done even as well as this,” Griselda said.

This was the evening of the following day after the conversation with the Conglomerate gentlemen and with the sibyl and the python. It was a few hundred miles distant from the previous scene, and Griselda Windfall, having found her way somehow to an interior place, was dining with a funny little creature in a funny little restaurant. They were set down to a fine compendium of the new edible clays and stones. It was a queer, refractory sort of place, but Griselda had adjusted to it in everything except her eyes and her mind. Her dinner date had been getting smaller, and the cafe-restaurant had been getting stranger and more intimate.

“I knew, of course, that Smithstone Clay had become edible,” she said, “but I had no idea that one could now eat Dogtooth Rock or Ganister or

Mealing Stone. I sure did not have any idea that they were so excellent.”

“Ah, yes, we are about to rehabilitate very many of the rocks and ores and metals. We will adapt them to Earth,” Griselda’s dinner companion said. He was a bent sort of little gnome with bright and peering eyes. “We can find a dozen uses for every one of them. The folks here were needing some new ideas when I came along. Oh, coal and oil and gas are good enough, and they couldn’t be had by regular people without the aid of folks who had fallen into my case. But people appreciate new benisons. Yes, and it is an act of charity and compensation to supply these new things, I believe. Stilbite, Amazonstone, Aztec Money - ah, they are wonderful stones, and we are finding wonderful uses for them.”

“Toad’s-Eye Tin, Asparagus Stone, Dry-bone Ore,” Griselda murmured fondly. “My husband, Lemuel, thought he could do great things with them if ever he could find an appropriate working place and conditions. Listen, Bright-eyes, what’s good is that there can be money in these things. Somebody goofed at first and let Smithstone Clay become edible free of charge. Now that they have it in such exotic restaurants as this, though, there will be a profit in it somewhere.”

“Do you not understand that all food was originally free food?” that little gnome said with his bent smile. “Do you not know that all shelter was originally free shelter, and that all property was originally free property?”

“Didn’t work, did it? And all those free things will not add up to a free trip to Paris for me. There has to be money generated somewhere. How did you become so bent, little Bright-eyes? You remind me very much of someone. How did I get here, anyhow, since the map had gone all haywire?”

“Or picketwire,” the gnome said.

“Yes, but I got here. And then both you and the place got funnier and funnier. However did you become so bent?”

“The first and second lumbar vertebrae are reversed. This emphasizes the crook in the back. It bends the head forward and down, to the ideal working and cogitational position. Really, the way that humans have their heads tilted, I don’t understand how they can do any thinking or working at all. This reversing of the vertebrae makes a change in the facial expression: one must always look up and peer at another person. There are even cases where persons aren’t recognized by their familiars after the

change. The reversing of these spinal segments also brings a change in the thought pattern, right down where it matters. Folks have spoken mistakenly of visceral thought, but that basic thing is really spinal thought. Spinal thought is very big here. So is medical practice. The changes are all made without surgery. They are made, in fact, without the... ah... patient being touched in any way. All topographical inversions are easy in a nontopographical ambience like this.”

“And you’ve been topographically inverted, Bright-eyes?” Griselda asked. “You weren’t always a gnome?”

“Oh, God help us all, Grissie. Being a gnome is all in the mind and in the shape.”

“What is that moaning and groaning?” she asked. It seems to be in the background of everything in this dismal place. And why aren’t there any colors here?”

“Oh, one of the requirements for a good workshop is that it be without distracting colors at all. And some folks moan and groan a lot when they’re at labor. They’re carrying on now like a bunch of ham actors because we’ve set them to work triggering easy-to-find deposits of orichalcum on Earth. We tell them that it’s easier to make than coal or oil, but they whimper about having to learn something new.”

“Orichalcum? You’re arranging for it to be found on Earth? Not for free, I hope?”

“You want it to be somehow otherwise, Grissie?”

“Certainly, Lem. Oh, I called you Lem - you remind me of him. I want the trick that they call the double modification set into it. I want it set in to my own gain. I’d like a few little fortunes to accrue to me, for a few little years.”

“Oh, I suppose so, Grissie. I’ll have them make out a Conveyance of Patent that you can take back to Earth with you. Yes, they are moaning and groaning quite a lot. They are the uncreative folks, so they must be Set to simple tasks. And simple tasks do become groaningly tedious.”

“What are the simple tasks, Bright-eyes?”

“Oh, mostly the old faithfuls, Consider all the coal and oil deposits that have been fabricated for Earth. Kobolds and goblins and gnomes, so long as they are in this place of tribulation and tribute, are forced to serve the people with these products. Yes, the legends of them working in mines and wells under the roots of mountains are true ones. The making



of these things is the hard part. Transferring them from nontopographical ambience like this to Earth is easy. It's a law that all objects tend to locate themselves in the nearest topography. The great accumulations or deposits or gluts on Earth have been passed off as natural or quasi-natural occurrences. They aren't, Grissie, they are manufactured things, and they were manufactured here."

"I'm promised fortunes on the orichalcum intrusions," Griselda said. "Oh, what are some of the other things that you are making in new profusion and for new uses?"

"Oh, Mealing Stone, French Chalk, Cottonball Borax."

"Oh, yes, yes. Lemuel was projecting work on all of those. How about Horseflesh Ore and Iron Rose?"

"We'll be ready with them quite soon, Grissie. And Mispickel and Noselite."

"Two of Lemuel's favorites. Oh, how startling! I've been sitting here with you and not realizing that you were Lemuel. I thought you were some gnome. But at least we buried you for Lemuel, though somehow you didn't seem quite dead. If you had, I wouldn't have come here on this wild-goose ride. No wonder I got lost. The deed said Picketwire Creek, but the people in the area call it Purgatory Creek."

"No, I don't seem quite dead, Grissie. This dying makes quite a change in some persons, but it hardly touched me at all. It upset Jasher Halfhogan seriously, very early in his life; that's why he always seemed a little strange to you. But dozens of things have happened to me that seem more decisive than dying. Ah, here's the Conveyance of Patent. They do fine engraving here, do they not? And this agrees to the double modification and assigns you the benefits. You can take this to Conglomerate Enterprises, or to Wheeler-Heelers, or to Le Conglomerat in Paris, or to any of them; and you'll be paid handsomely."

"To Paris? Oh, if I could only get there, Lem! And with a fortune yet!"

"Oh, you can walk out of here and into any of a thousand different primary interchanges on Earth. Think Paris, and you will come out in Paris."

"Oh, Lem, Lem! Is there anything that you need here?"

"Why don't you send me my old red sweater? There's always been so much moaning and groaning about the heat here that they have overcompensated against it. It will be nice to have my old sweater here

when I work late.”

“I’ll send it, Lem, I’ll send it!” Griselda cried. She kissed him, or perhaps she missed him. She thought Paris. She rushed out of there. And she came out in Paris in the middle of...

...the Rue de Purgatoire. And right around the corner was Le Conglomerat, where she traded the Conveyance of Patent for a few of those fortunes. And all around every corner was Paris.

“Oh, the red light of orichalcum,” she sang, “and Paris!” For Griselda was a good-looker, now and forever. And with the kind of fortunes that she had, a good-looker like Griselda could have her heart’s desire in that place.

## THE SKINNY PEOPLE OF LEPTOPHLEBO STREET

— and turned into Leptophebo Street (it's always a scruffy sort of delight to come into it). It was a minor discovery and a sudden entrance, like going through a small and florid door into a whole new world, a world of only one street.

The chattering of the monkeys was what struck him first, and then the chattering of the people in a kindred tone: and then the absolute cleanliness of the place, and the pleasant bouquets of selected and superior smells. Close on that was a whole dazzle of details that would take days to assimilate.

The poverty of the street struck him last of all, and then it seemed a more pleasant poverty with some other name. It was picked-clean poverty, as if every speck of dust had been hand-gathered from between the cobblestones as something as valuable as lept pepper or gold.

Canute Freeboard, adventurous investor and freebooter-at-large, had come to Leptophebo Street for what money could be found there; but the street seemed bare of value. He had come looking for a man named Hiram Poorlode. Canute needed money, and that was the year that money was very tight. There were those who said that money might be got in Leptophebo Street, but they all laughed when they said it.

“Could you tell me where I might find a man named Hiram Poorlode?” Canute asked a friendly-looking young fellow there.

“Kmee-fee-eee-eee-eee,” the young fellow said, and Canute saw that a mistake had been made. “I'm sorry,” he said. “I hadn't noticed that you were a monkey.”

The monkey nodded as if to say that it was quite all right, and he motioned for Canute to come along with him. They stopped in front of a man who was sitting cross-legged on the stories of the street. The man had a sign ‘Nuts, Wholesale and Retail’: he had a pandanus leaf in front of him and on the leaf there were seven filbert-nuts and two alinonds. The monkey pointed the man out to Canute and Canute to the man and he said “Knee-fee-eee-eee-eee.” Then he skittered away.

“Yes, I am Hiram Poorlode,” the nut-man said. “Thank you, Hoxie.” He spoke the latter to the skittering monkey.

“Get your clothes rewoven, sir. Get your clothes rewoven,” a young boy chanted at Canute. “My father reweaves clothes free. Turn those

baggy clothes into trim fit real fast.”

“My clothes aren’t baggy,” Canute said. “Boy, they sure will be baggy in a little while,” the boy said. “Better get it done now.”

“Get your teeth cleaned sir!” another young boy chanted at Canute. “My father cleans teeth excellent free.”

“Is he your son?” Canute asked the street-sitting nut-merchant Hiram Poorlode.

“Oh no. This one is Marquis Shortribs,” Hiram introduced. “His father is Royal Shortribs who is a tycoon in teeth. And I am Hiram Poorlode, nut-merchant, investor, moneylender. Sit down on the cobbles, sir, and talk to me. You are the only customer in my shop at the moment so I can give you my full time.”

“I am Canute Freeboard, a stranger in this country and in this town. I expressed strong interest in obtaining investment money. The man to whom I had introduction must have been a humorist and he played a lopsided joke on me. Ah, how is the nut business?”

“It hasn’t been a bad morning,” Hiram said. “I received twelve filbert-nuts on consignment this morning and I have already sold five of them. With my mark-up, this gives me enough equity in filberts that I call eat one myself and still have enough cash on hand to cover those sold. This is known as eating free and it is the first rule of economic independence. As to the almond nuts, I own them outright. I started the day with five of them and I have sold three for cash. This is the best sales record that I can remember, up to this time of day, for almonds. I also own the pandanus leaf. That being so, I am almost insulated against misfortune. If I sell nothing for the rest of the day it will still not be a complete catastrophe.”

“Haircyt, sir? Haircut, sir?” a small boy cried in set-chant. “My father does supreme haircutting and head-grooming free.”

“No, I don’t believe so, boy,” Canute mumbled. “Is he your son, Mr. Poorlode?”

“Oh no. This is Crispin Halfgrain the son of Claude Halfgrain the biggest man in hair and fields in Leptophlebo Street. Some of the finest garments here are woven by his wife Rita from the hair that Claude collects in his studio. You are looking for investment money? I am the most promiscuous money-lender in Leptophlebo Street. How much do you need?”

Hiram Poorlode, as did all the skinny people of Leptophlebo Street, wore a very large, flat, wide-brimmed hat that was crawling all over with rambling greenery. Canute now saw that what Hiram really wore on top of his head was a growing vegetable and fruit and grain garden. And all those garden-hats were tilted to catch all the sun possible.

“I’m afraid that we’re not thinking on the same scale,” Canute said dourly. “I need eighty-five thousand dollars for an opportune deal, such a deal as will come only once in my life. I need the sum at no more than seven percent interest and I need it today. Yes, my acquaintance in this city must be a humorist.”

“Here are the shoes back again, Mr. Poorlode,” a small boy said, and he set a good-looking pair of smooth shoes down beside Hiram. “He will not need them again for two hours, but he believed that Mr. Shortribs may want them before that.”

“Thank you, Piet,” Hiram said, and the boy skipped off. “That is Piet,” Hiram told Canute, “the son of Jan Thingruel who gathers more astatic grain out of cracks than does anyone else on the Street. We have but one pair of shoes here, and whatever person goes to make a prestigious visit will wear the shoes her shoes. They fit all persons in the street, since Claude Halfgrain had the final joints of four of the toes removed last year. They are good shoes and we take excellent care of them. I am shoe custodian this week.” Hiram Poorlode lifted up one of the flag-stones of the street and put the shoes down into a shoe-hole that was underneath it. --

“I have the money by me now,” Hiram said then. “Nothing is easier than eighty-five thousand dollars in gold. And, with me, a man’s face is his security. Give me half an hour to consider you for I am a cautious man. Spend the time pleasantly: visit and observe our rather odd Leptophlebo Street here. Enjoy yourself, sir, and be assured that your case is under active consideration. I call tell a lot about a man by watching how he reacts to Leptophlebo Street.”

“All right,” Canute said. “I’d given up hope of raising the money anyhow. Money is tight this season. All but it was a sweet, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! Yes, it’s an odd little street here. How much do you sell the filberts for?”

“Three for a mill. On, it’s the standard coin to the Street. One tenth of a cent.”

One might as well enjoy the drollery. Really, Canute had never seen anything quite like Leptophlebo Street; never such skinny monkeys or such skinny people. The monkeys couldn't talk properly. There's an old saying that whenever monkeys do talk there's some monkey-business going on.

Well, there was plenty of it going on here, but all that the monkeys could say was "Khlee-fee- eee-eee-eee." The monkeys wrote notes on little pieces of paper and gave them to the merchants of the Street. They brought in fruit and they traded it or sold it. From the merchants they bought a few nuts that were out-of-season in the woods, bought them for clay coins or in trade for their in-season fruits or nuts. The people asked the monkeys about their families and about the situation in the woods, and the monkeys wrote the answers on little pieces of paper.

"The monkeys are so smart," Canute said, "that it seems as if they could talk. As long as you are doing business with them anyhow you could teach them speech."

"People of the monkey caste are not allowed to talk," Effie Poorlode said (she was the wife of Hiran the nut-merchant). "Everyone has his niche in the world, and the monkeys don't have talking niches. And it would be no profit to us to teach them speech. We have plenty of time to wait for them to write out their notes, and we do make a good profit on the paper that they write them on."

The people of Leptophlebo Street were the skinniest folks that Canute had ever seen. How the ribs stood out on them! Two ribby young ladies were in a booth down the street. "What? Do you sell the paper to the monkeys?" Canute asked Effie Poorlode.

"Get your teeth cleaned free, sir!" the boy Marquis Shortribs was soliciting a passer-by. "My father does excellent tooth-cleaning free." But the passer-by continued on.

"If the tooth-cleaning is free, and if there are no customers anyhow, then where is the profit?" Canute asked.

"Oh, there will always be customers," Effie told him. "Suppose that ten thousand persons go by and do not avail themselves on this service. But then the very next person might stop at the Shortribs' booth, and you can see how that would make all the waiting and solicitations worth while. As to your question, no, we don't sell the pieces of paper to the monkeys. The monkeys make the paper in the woods, and they make the ink too. They

write their notes on the paper and they give them to us. You can see that the profit will be enormous. If we get only eight or ten of these little pieces of paper a day look how they will count up. We dissolve the ink of the paper, and when we have a thousand pounds of the ink we can sell it to ink-bottlers or pen-makers of the city.”

“How long will it take to accumulate a thousand pounds?” Canute asked.

“Oh, it would probably take its a thousand years, but what’s time so long as we keep busy? And we find all sorts of uses for the little pieces of paper. I tell you that there is money in paper; there is money in everything.”

“How much money is there in everything, Mrs. Poorlode?” Canute questioned.

“Yesterday my husband and I cleared one cent and three mills from all our businesses,” Effie answered. “And we also achieved equities in three other mills. This is better than most of our days, but all our days are good. Oh the wealth does accumulate!”

Mrs. Poorlode was like the valiant woman in scripture as she stood proud and skinny, with her garden on top of her head and with her hands busy leaching nut-shells in a bowl.

“This processes the nut-shells for industrial use,” she said, “and we have the Nut-Shell Bitter Tea left over to drink. It makes the bones glossy. My husband gives a rebate to every purchaser of one of our nuts if he returns the shell after he has eaten the meat out of it. We are blessed to live on a street that has so many business opportunities.”

There was nothing very interesting about the gaunt rib-cage of Effie Poorlode.

“Yes,” she said, reading the thoughts of Canute Freeboard, “the townsmen lust after our ribs and after our ossuary generally. There is nothing wrapped up about us. There are some persons in the town with so much flesh grown onto their bones that their fundamental persons and passions are buried away and their real impact is never felt. Luckily that is not so with the people of Leptophlebo Street.”

“How is the street kept so clean and swept?” Canute asked.

“Brooms with both astatic and static bristles are the secret,” Effie told him. “Organic dust clings to the static bristles, and the non-organic dust is swept clean into gathering vessels by the astatic bristles. Then we pass

the brushes over degaussing jets that release the organic particles, and we make soup from them. And the non-organic dust is separated into flammable and inflammable piles.”

“They mean the same thing,” Canute said.

“Not on Leptophlebo Street they don’t,” Effie insisted. “So we make briquettes to burn as fuel out of the one sort. And we make bricks and flagstones and face-stones for buildings out of the other sort. So we have our soup and our fuel and our bricks, and we keep the street clean all the time.”

A medium sized bird, probably a grackle, came down onto the rim of the garden-containing hat that Effie carried balanced on her head. And the bird was stuck fast. Canute saw that the edge of the hat was bird-limed to catch anything that landed there.

“I will wait,” Effie said. “The pot wants a bird, but the pot must wait also. These grackle-birds attract one another for a while. This is not one of our own grackles that I know; it’s one of the newly-arrived grackles from the countryside. They will not be wary of one bird stuck there, nor of two birds stuck. They will not be wary of less than three stuck birds. I will be patient and I will have three grackles for food and for by-products. Will you not stay with us this evening and have a look at our night-life on Leptophlebo Street?”

“I don’t know what I will do,” Canute said. “I haven’t comprehended it all yet.”

“Lose weight free in seven minutes surgery, sir,” a small boy chanted. “My father does good free work. He is one good loser.”

“No, not right now, boy,” Canute said.

“Have your appendix out, sir? Have Your appendix out?” another small boy was putting the shill on. “My father performs faithful appendectomies free.”

“No, not right now,” Canute said.

“This boy is Pat Thingruel, the brother of Piet and the son of Jan Thingruel,” Effie told Canute. “The father is as stylish a free appendectonlist as you will find anywhere.”

“I do not understand how all the people of Leptophlebo Street can work for free,” Canute said. “How do they profit by it?”

A second curious grackle-bird came down and got itself squawkishly stuck in the bird-lime of the edging of Effie’s garden-hat.



“Oh, there’s a lots of profit!” Effie exclaimed. “A veriform appendix, especially when inflamed, is a veritable storehouse of richness. Master microchemists like ourselves can manufacture all sorts of useful things from such rich material. And the teeth that Royal Shortribs cleans, do you realize just how super-organic are the deposits taken from teeth? Do you know how many things can be woven and fabricated from the hair that Claude Halfgram cuts? Garments, rugs, tents, seines, modish gowns for the modish ladies in the town. Almost solid profit. And the head-grooming that he does, do you know that there are some very lively products to be had from that? Our greatest industry, though, is the night soil that we gather from the cooperative of people of the town. And I will tell you something else if you will promise not to tell the monkeys.”

“No, I won’t breathe a word of your secret to the monkeys,” Canute promised.

“We pay the monkeys only half as much per equal weight for their night soil as we pay the people in the town. And the monkeys bring theirs to us; we don’t have to go and get it. Ah, there is profit everywhere you look, in the stones, in the air, in the very rain. What a money-harvest we do have! Mills and miles and cents and cents, and at the end of a week we may even have another nickel for our hard work.”

“It’s a wonder you don’t gather belly-button fuzz and process it for profit,” Canute laughed.

“Of course we do,” Effie cried. “We gather more than a pound a year of it from the, people of the town, and this in spite of the fact that many of the burghers will not cooperate with us and say that the whole thing is silly. But there are a few friendly people in town who wear wool. The woolies are the best for the fuzz. And it can be made into the softest of all sheens. Oh do stay over and have a look at our night-life tonight, Mr. Freeboard! Really, it’s wonderful the times that we do have.”

A third grackle came and stuck itself in the bird-lime on Effie’s head-garden. And then was heard ‘Sorrow in Three Voices by Grackles’: but only those three would be stuck there. Others would veer away from the three birds in trouble.

But a fourth bird did come, a bird carrying a long piece of broken looking-glass in its beak. It was too wise to get caught in the bird-lime, but it was watched with avid eyes. Sometime it would drop that piece of silvered glass, and some person would rush in and catch it before it hit

the ground. There's profit to be had from old mirror glass.

A man with affluent gestures arrived at Hiram Poorlode's booth in a sudden hurry. He had the sharp, lean, craggy face of a bird of prey. He was taut and of a restless thinness in every part. Why, he was none other than the Lean Eagle from Lean Eagle Street!

"Hiram, I'm caught short," said that opulent man who wore diamonds on every finger. "I have to cover. I'm overextended. It will be only for a few days. I need two and a quarter million dollars and I need it now. I have my dray here."

But the Lean Eagle was the highest-flying and the most rapacious money-man ever. Why should he cooie to Leptophlebo Street to borrow?

"With me, a man's face is his security," Hiram Poorlode said, "and I know your face, Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof. A man of such a name and reputation is security itself."

Hiram removed three of the largest flagstones from the street on which he had been sitting. He passed the heavy bars of gold up to the nine lackeys who served Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof. It took a fair number of gold bars to amount to two and one quarter million dollars.

"There has to be all explanation to this!" Canute Freeboard howled out loud. "Oh, but by all the equivocating things that be, there can't be any explanation to it!"

When the lackeys had loaded all the gold bars onto the dray, Mr. Schlemel kurz Karof signed a note and gave it to Hiram Poorlode. Then that opulent man went away with his dray and his lackeys, and Hiram Poorlode replaced the three flagstones in the street.

Canute Freeboard hummed a little tune to himself. There were some notes missing from that time. "How long did it take you and your husband, at a nickel a week, to get to a position where you could make instant loans of two and a quarter million dollars and still have lots more gold glittering in your gold-hole under the street?" Canute asked Effie.

"It sure did take a long time," she said. "There just aren't any short-cuts." Effie took her from her husband the note that Schemel kurz Karof, the Lean Eagle, had given him. She dissolved the ink off it and put it in the ink accumulation. And she put the de-inked paper with the paper accumulation.

"How will you collect when the writing is dissolved off the note for the ink?" Canute asked Hiram.

“Ah, a man’s face is his security to me,” Hiram said. “He will pay me back. And if he does not, what is the difference? In time I will accumulate the amount again, and I have lots of time.”

“Hey, is the handsome man going to stay around for the night-life this evening?” two pretty young skinny ladies asked. “We sure do have a lot of fun at night-life fiesta.”

“These nice young ladies are Regina and Maharana Shortribs,” Effie Poorlode introduced them. “I believe that a good-looking you man like you could have a lot of fun just sky-larking with them at night-life, Canute.”

“You know what we do for the climax of a night-life go-it-all?” Maharana asked. Oh, the skin and bones of that young girl! They’d send shivers of delight through anyone.

But sometimes one must put second things first.

“Ah, about that loan,” Canute spoke to Hiram. “On by the swept cobbles of Leptophlebo Street, there has got to be an explanation to this! About that loan, Mr. Poorlode?”

“Oh, certainly,” Hiram said. “I’ve been observing you and I now have complete confidence in you. I’ll lend you the money. Eighty-five thousand dollars, was it not? Do you want it in gold or in certified cash warrants?”

“In gold, in gold. On, what a beautiful, hard-scrabble, skinny street this is!”

Canute rejoiced. “How have you done it? How have you accumulated millions of dollars in gold on a nickel a week?”

“In bad weeks we don’t make near that much,” Effie Poorlode said.

“Ah, but where does the gold come from?” Canute pursued the matter.

“Oh, there’s several legends about the origin of the gold,” Hiram told him. “One story is that it’s rabbit gold and that it reproduces itself, that it all comes from two nuggets that got together under the flagstones.”

“But there is raw nugget gold there. There is bar gold and ingot gold. And there is coined gold of various coinages,” Canute protested. Hiram had already removed the stories that covered the gold in the street.

“Yes,” Hiram agreed, “several pair of different forms of rabbit gold would be required, wouldn’t they? Then there’s the story that it’s all monkey gold. The monkeys find it and refine it in the woods. Then they give it to us noble burghers of the Street. They are afraid to keep it. It is

said that they did keep it when they were men, and that that's what made monkeys out of them. You don't believe that entirely? Oh, I see that Hoxie has been monkey-facing my act behind my back." And Hoxie had been doing that. But had he been saying 'Do not believe all of it' with his monkey-facing, or had he been saying 'Do not believe any of it'?

"The third legend is that it is all pound-of-flesh gold," Hiram said. "This legend states that we sell pounds of flesh for the yearly bashes of the Extortioners' Guild and the Hatchet-Makers' Guild and especially for that dread secret society Glomerule; and that we receive our gold for the pounds of flesh. Ah, there it is, Canute, all ready for you to take it: eighty-five thousand dollars worth of gold. It's quite a bit over a hundred pounds. The young ladies will help you carry it."

"Which of the three legends is true, Hiram?" Canute asked softly.

"Oh, they're all a little bit true, but all together they would only account for only a fraction of our gold."

"What accounts for the rest?"

"How can we tell you that? It's a secret. We know you are not so base a person as to want us to tell you the answer. You will have the pleasure of guessing it as the years go by, but we will not tell it to you. Ah, your gold is ready for you, Canute."

"We know you are not such a fink-dink as would like to be told," Effie said. "It took the last one about a thousand years to guess it, and you want to miss all that fun?"

"Who was the last one to guess it?" Canute asked.

"Me," said Hiram.

"We know you are not such a cheap-creep as would listen even if someone whispered the answer to you," Maharana Shortribs said. "We know you are better than that. My sister and I will help you carry the gold."

"You will not tell me where it comes from," Canute mused. "And you offer it to me so freely that there has to be a catch to it somewhere. What is the catch, Hiram? There's a hook in the bait, isn't there? It's logical that there would be a hook."

"Oh sure, but it's so thin a hook that you'll hardly notice it. And believe me, the hook isn't a logical one."

"Hardly notice it, huh? That may be like saying that a knife is so thin that you'll hardly notice it when it goes in between your fifth and sixth

ribs,” Canute said doubtfully.

“Yes, exactly like,” Effie Poorlode chimed in. “How did you know about the cut between the fifth and sixth ribs, Canute? It isn’t one of the major cuts.”

“Lose weight free in seven minute process,” a little boy chanted at Cnaute. “My father is king of all the weight-takers-off in Leptophlebo Street.”

“Not right now,” Canute said.

“Get your clothes rewoven free,” another little boy chanted. “My father reweaves baggy too-big clothes for slim-trim limb.”

“Not right now,” Canute said. “Does the hook hurt, Hiram?”

“Only a little bit. Only for a minute. Take the gold, Canute, and go close your deal. Then come back here for certain entertainments and kindnesses that we will have scheduled for you. You’ll really like them. And when you have experienced them, and the mark that goes with them, then you will be one of us and you may enjoy Leptophlebo Street for as often as you like and for as long as you like. And you won’t even notice the hook when it goes in.”

“And afterwards? When I do notice it?”

“I told you that it hurts only a little bit, and for only a little while. We do want you to be one of us. We want you sincerely.”

Canute Freeboard looked up and down the crooked length of Leptophlebo Street.

“Choose us, join with us,” said that skinny young lady Regina Shortribs. “Have fun with us. And come back often.” And Canute looked at the wonderfully bony form of Regina.

He looked at Hiram Poorlode’s sign which read “Nuts Wholesale and Retail”. He looked at the three sad grackle-birds that were stuck to the top-of-the-head garden of Effie Poorlode, and at that other unstuck grackle that was flying around with a piece of looking-glass in its beak. He looked at Highfellow, Redbone, Roxie, and Hoxie, the solemn monkeys of the street.

Hoxie wrote a note and gave it to Canute. “Join with us. Stay with us. We like you,” the note read. Effie Poorlode took the note from Canute to dissolve the ink off it. A tear ran down Canute’s face for he was genuinely moved by the friendship of the monkeys. The little boy Crispin Halfgrain raced in and caught the falling tear in a special little cup before it hit the

street.

“My mother can use it,” Crispin said. “Each teardrop is a storehouse of balanced chemicals. The special salinity is quite prized.”

“Analyze your dreams, analyze your dreams!” a little boy of the street was making a pitch. “My father makes fine dream analyses free. Lie down on the cobbles.”

“How can your father make a living by analyzing dreams free?” Canute asked.

“Residuals,” the little boy said. “He gets rich on the residuals.”

“Choose us, join us,” said that skinny young lady Maharana Shortribs. “Have fiesta with us and come back all the time. Hey, do you know what we do for the climax of one of our night-life go-it-alls?” Canute looked at the wonderfully bony throat of Maharana.

“I make my choice,” he announced. “I swallow that bait, hook and all. I become a partisan of this street.” (Even the lop-eared dogs of the place raised their ears and snouts in joy.) “I take the loan now in cash. “ (The people began to cheer.) “I will go and seize the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.” (Folks began to laugh and to tune muscial instruments.) “And then I will come back here for the entertainments and kindnesses and the night-life.” (The monkeys were clapping their hands.)

There was real welcome in the wind, and somewhere near there was the joyful whetting of knives. Canute and the Shortribs sisters picked up the gold bars and went with them and closed the deal. So Canute nailed down the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but he knew that it was small stuff compared to the mysterious opportunity of Leptophlebo Street itself.

They came back to Leptophlebo Street, and a ‘Gala and Welcome’ banner was stretched clear across the street. So it was quite impossible to decline any of the activities. And who would want to? The trumpet was blowing a great blast, and the other instruments were joining in

Canute was having his teeth cleaned, his head groomed, his appendix removed, his dreams analyzed, some other pleasant surgery being done to him, and his clothes rewoven all at one time. This was life at its most full, and the dazzle and confusion were to be expected.

“This is the first appendectomy since my father got his knife sharpened,” Pat Thigruel sang happily in Canute’s ear. “Oh, you are lucky! Listen now as I join the rowdy-dow band for you. I play eighth

flute.”

“And this is the first free seven minute surgery since my father got his knives sharpened,” another little boy was chirruping. “Listen when I join the band. I play fifth drum.” Canute couldn’t remember what the free seven minute surgery was about but it had to be good. He heard the eight flute and the fifth drum join the hand and it was rapturous music. His dreams were being analyzed right on the glittering edge of his senses and he could only guess what rich residuals they would have. And a written note was placed shyly before his eyes.

“Listen now as I join the rang-dang hand,” it read in the handwriting of the monkey Hoxie. “I play third bagpipe.” Canute passed the note to Effie Poorlode for processing and salvaging. Everything that was done on Leptophlebo Street contributed to the fortune of that famous place. With joy Canute heard the third bagpipe join the rang-dang hand. He was in glowing confusion as he recovered from his surgeries (there had been several of them) and his cleanings and groomings and reweavings and other things. Oh it all did make him feel light and light-headed and slick-fit and trim-limbed and happy!

“Hurry up and heal up,” Regina Shortribs was talking into his ear. “Heal real fast. Drink this cup of Nut-Shell Bitter Tea. It’s medicinal, and it also makes the bones glossy. Then we will go and honkey-tonk.”

“You know what we do for the climax of our night-life go-it-alls?” Maharana Shortribs asked once more.

“No, but I will like it,” Canute gloated happily. He was feeling almost healed now. In another minute he would be healed completely. “What do you do for climax, Maharana?”

“Eat bowls of real organic soup,” the skinny girl breathed the delightful information. She made it sound wonderful, and of course it was. But Canute was watching the way that her skinny throat moved when she spoke. It was sheer witchery of ligament and sinew.

As Canute rose to his feet with a little help, the band played on with flutes and drums and bagpipes and all the wonderful and skinny-sounding instruments. It was certainly fine just to be there between the two beautiful and meager Shortribs girls.

“I have swallowed the hook without noticing it,” Canute said, “and it didn’t hurt a but. I wonder what distinguishing mark has been placed upon me? And my rewoven clothes fit me so trim! How is it possible that

anything should be so trim? I feel wonderful and light. I wonder how I look?"

"Bird, bird!" Maharana cried, and she clapped her hands. "Bring the looking glass!"

"Oh gee, now it comes," Effie Pooriode said apprehensively.

"Remember that even the Lean Eagle was known as the Fat Eagle before he trafficked here," said Regina.

"And remember that it only hurts a little bit and for a little while," said Hiram.

"No man can have everything, but on Leptophlebo Street he sure can come close," Canute gloated. "Now let's just see whether I look as fine as I feel."

The grackle-bird brought the piece of looking-glass to him. And Canute took it.

He looked at his image in it.

He cried out in shock!

His face cracked in a spasm of agony. And the looking glass shattered into tinkling slivers that fell, and were caught before reaching the street, by a small boy who would have profitable salvage from them.

But it hadn't been Canute in that mirror. It had been a horrifying skill-and-bone thing. That slick seven minute free surgery had removed more than a hundred pounds of his flesh by a hundred cuts, one of them between the fifth and sixth ribs.

There was a ghastly screaming going on and on.

It hadn't been Canute in the glass. And it couldn't be him now. It was a horrifying devil. It was a starved and demented ghoul. It was a malodorous ghost. It was a misbegotten bony abomination. It was —

It was one of the skinny people of Leptophlebo Street. It was himself, of course: and the screaming voice was his own.

Heavy tears were running down Canute's face

("It only hurts for a little bit and for a little while," Hiram was saying again.)

in outrageous streams

("You'll learn to like yourself this way," Maharana was saying. "We like you this way.")

and falling

(But how could you become one of us if you didn't become one of us?)



Effie was chiding.)

to be caught in a special cup by Crispin Halfgrain  
("The special salinity is quite prized," he was saying.)  
before they hit the Street.

## OR LITTLE DUCKS EACH DAY

*“Against no word is there such strong prejudice as against the word ‘Prejudice’.”*

*The Back Door of History,  
—Arpad Arutinov*

Jim Snapjudge was unhappy without apparent reason. It couldn't be anything preying on his mind. His was a mind that preyed: not one to be preyed upon. He had not been brooding: he did not brood: he thought and moved by swift intuition. No derelictions or wolves of the past were snapping at his heels. His business was all with the future, intelligent prediction. Once the past had been assimilated, he did not turn back to it. And anything following him would have to feed many a cake to the heads of the dog-devil that guarded that time road before overtaking Jim Snapjudge. He was secure.

He felt no guilt for the suicide of Cletus Dogwood. He wasn't responsible for it. He hadn't caused it. He couldn't have stopped it. He had merely judged, correctly, that it would happen. It had been a little disquieting when Cletus insisted that there must be some mistake in the prediction, and Snapjudge had assured him that a mistake was impossible. But as for guilt for anything, why what did Snapjudge owe for? Guilt means owing payment or gelt or yield. Word-meanings were important to Snapjudge for his whole profession and life's direction and fortune depended on the meaning of one word.

And should he feel remorse for the late-life criminality that broke out in Angelo Woodstock? It's true that he was the only Prejudicial Analyst who had predicted it accurately, but he had gathered more data than the others had. But remorse, which is to say biting again or backbiting, no, he didn't feel remorse for such things as that. Yet something was presently biting him in an inaccessible spot. Not biting him again, but biting him newly and mysteriously.

Anyhow, he couldn't afford second thoughts about such things. Second thoughts are always duplication, an inefficiency that a Prejudicial Analyst cannot allow himself.

A young man, pleasant and impudent of face, was approaching Snapjudge from the front as he walked through Actuaries' Concourse.

The man seemed about to speak to Snapjudge, but instead of that he cocked an eye at him, grinned a crooked grin, and passed on. And perhaps he was gone forever.

No he wasn't. There was a handle on the young man; Snapjudge would encounter him again. That was predictable. For even such a quick passing was sufficient to permit a good Prejudicial Analyst like Jim Snapjudge to give a rapid and basically exact reading.

'Twenty-four years and five or six months old. Born in the autumn, that's sure. Name is approximately Godfrey Halskragen (if the surname had been Englished to Tippet, as had been considered by the father of the man, it would have left a stronger indication; but Halskragen it had remained), from Gallipolis Ohio, so what was he doing down-stream here in Kronstadt? Oh, that could be answered, if it mattered. Not quite sure where in Gallipolis the man had lived, but probably on one of those tree-named streets that slope down towards that river. There was some indication that he had lived in two different houses not too far apart. Mostly of German-Irish blood. A lapsed Lutheran or Catholic. No, no, his German ears were halsstarrig (stubborn), but not that stubborn. A man with such graceful tragi to his ears could hardly be a Lutheran. Wife may be named Irene (Iris rejected after short consideration), and he may never see her again in life. This man (Godfrey tentative) have the opportunity to transfer to this town with his old firm (P & G Rotary Valve Company) at an increase in pay. And he is here to look the town over and decide. He believes, wrongly, that his ever-new resolutions (he is a boozier) will stand up better in a new town. But he will be drawn down into the Rhineland part of town tonight, into the Rangle-Tangles and Bierstuben and Schnapps-Shacks. And he will die there, drowned in the fools' cup as they used to say.

Snapjudge did not verbalize all this judgment to himself, but he did record it all in his mind in an annotation that was faster than words. There is a gyroscopic principle in the Analysis: high speed accompanying accuracy and balance. A slower judgment would wobble and be less accurate. This was the quick first impression, the only allowable impression for a Prejudicial Analyst. And Snapjudge's impressions, based as they always were on tens of thousands of previous impressions, were uncannily right.

But then Snapjudge did a thing that he did very seldom. He looked

back. And the young man who had passed him also looked back at the same instant, and their looks met. Their thoughts crossed like two rapiers made out of swift sunlight.

“Could I not be different from my template?” the thought of the young man laughed back at Snapjudge. “Have I to die tonight just because my pattern says ‘die’? May I not escape?” And the young man winked crookedly. Snapjudge catalogued it as an amoebic wink, but he was puzzled at his own attaching such a name to it.

“No, you may not escape,” Snapjudge flashed back the stilted thought. “As I have judged you, so you are judged.” But he was startled by his own arrogance. Was this the beginning of uncertainty? But why should a Prejudicial Analyst ever be uncertain?

“That young man is prescient,” Snapjudge told himself. “How could I have missed that? His orbital index is too low for him to be a prescient. Easy, Jim, easy. Were there true prescients, we Prejudicial Analysts would be obsoleted. We’ll not let that happen.” Then Snapjudge was taken by a cold chill. It was not over the idea of prescients; it was over something that happened years before.

Two dozen years back, in a biology laboratory period, Jim Snapjudge, his eye to a microscope, had been examining a slide at four hundred power magnification. And something had drifted onto that slide that had no business there. It was a face that barely missed being a human face, that missed even more narrowly being a demon face. And it had winked sardonically and chillingly and crookedly. It was because of that not-quite-human face on the slide that Jim Snapjudge did not become a biologist. He became a Prejudicial Analyst instead.

Why bring that old puzzlement up now? Well, the young man (whose name was approximately Godfrey Halskragen) had winked with exactly that same sardonic and chilling and crooked wink as had the blob under the microscope years before. Yes, it was an amoebic wink. And it meant that there was in this Godfrey Halskragen some thing, too small to see with the plain eye, that would contradict with absolute stubbornness whatever analysis Snapjudge should make. There was plain revolt there.

At that time there was still some prejudice against Prejudicial Analysts. But why should there be? Why this irrational recoil that appeared so often and so foolishly?

We are not commonly in court of law and pledged to hold no previous

information on a subject. Then we should not, as a normal thing, be required to have minds wiped clear of all memory or manifestation. We are not meant to be like little ducks who wake up in a new world each day. For a prejudice is simply a pre-judgement, a decision based upon previous as well as immediate evidence. If I found certain things to be true yesterday, why may I not take them into account in making a decision today or tomorrow? If a certain person has taken advantage of me last week, why must I trust him in an identical situation today? And actually, using the guidelines of previous situations and encounters and persons, we can tell almost everything about a person merely by looking at him. Even if he puts his head in a sack, we can tell, much about him by the sack he selects and the way he fashions it to wear.

This man is Scotch, I say for an instance, and the Scotch lean to a certain sort of character. This man has lewd and vulgar ears, and they are the sort of ears that criminals often have. This man has a pronounced septum between the nostrils, and such persons are proud without reason, self-centered to the point of having no very clear idea of the outside world; they are dishonest and presuming. Or this other man has greedy thumbs. What should I do, put gloves on my eyes so I do not see them?

Should one be required to say of a person or situation 'I will accept no evidence on this man or thing except today's evidence generated today?' There cannot be any such segregation of evidence. The very shape of a man's head is evidence, and it was shaped in the course of his whole lifetime and only a little bit today. The way that a man walks is evidence of what he is. His name is evidence that goes back through his whole ancestry. A man with the first name of Howard will be one sort of man. A man with the first name of Harold will be of another sort. There is nothing accidental about this. But one who must make an appraisal today cannot wait for a man to act like a Howard or a Harold. Only a small chunk of the picture will be revealed in one day or in one season. It must be supposed that the man will act in such a way as previous evidence indicates, the supposition being based on the man's own past actions where they may be ascertained, and on the past actions of hundred of other people of the same type.

The use of such suppositions is named Prejudice. Their directed use is named Active Prejudice. And the really effective and illuminating use of a corpus of suppositions is named Prejudice as a Work of Art.

The work of Prejudicial Analysts is always Prejudice as Work of Art.

Each person is a total walking history of himself. The history is total in that it gives not only what the person has done but also what he will do. These histories aren't even very hard to read, not for Prejudicial Analysts.

Another person was now approaching Jim Snapjudge from ahead. She was a dusky young lady who was dressed loudly in the primary colors so that she was like a column of happy and shouting flowers. Outside of her brightly colored clothing, she was rather commonplace in appearance, or at least she was so to common eyes. To the eyes of an expert Prejudicial Analyst she was not too uncommon either, and she was quickly placed. She was placed into relatively simple categories. She was placed firmly, irrevocably, and in considerable details.

'Twenty-one years old last March.' Jim Snapjudge was sending, receiving, and recording in the annotation more rapid than voice, 'and her name may very well be Teresa Tuesdaychild. Hers isn't a continuing surname. It was given to her by her mother, out of whimsy, and all in one piece. In her line there had been, for practical purposes, parthenogenesis for three generations, for they were not marrying ladies in her ancestry. Teresa came up here from the shallow-clay in the South, from the little piny woods and the nanny-goat hills, but all of those ladies go into the towns when the years for it arrive. And each of those ladies has a bosomful of gold pieces.

'This Teresa has a well-paying job in a highly technical field and she fulfills it amazingly. It isn't that she is a person of much technical training. Indeed she lied cheerfully about her qualifications to get this job, and she also presented forged articles and certificates that were provided by a person called John the Forge. But she does have great intuition, strong tactile intelligence, penetrating imagination; and there are few technical problems that can stand up against her. She has so much vitality that she must constantly be sharing it with others. She is one of the bright-star people with the tide running always in her favor. And, so far as she knows, she a quite happy.

'She is a person of several different lives, and she moves easily from one into another. But, though she has a solid hold on all the up-town things, money, happy employment, fulfillment of leisure, variety in her own person, attention of many young gentlemen on the rapid rise (one of them a double-ducky buckaroo of great moxie and moment), though she

has contagious gaiety, though she has multiplying group interests, yet she is going down to Rhineland tonight without any of her friends. She will find sordid encounter there and she will meet her ruination, the nature of which remains a little foggy even to a Prejudicial Analyst.'

Well, that was the quick judgment.

This dusky girl who might be named Teresa Tuesdaychild had now gone on past Jim Snapjudge. And, a short moment later, Snapjudge did (for the second time that day) a thing that he did very seldom. He looked back. And Teresa, who had gone by him, also looked back, and their looks met.

"Must it really be my ruination?" the thought of the young lady lightened back at Snapjudge, and her full vocal intonation was somehow in that thought. "Are you quite sure what sort of encounter I will have down in Rhineland, in the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House where Elm Street ends on the River?" And she flashed Snapjudge a dusky and not very friendly grin.

"I have read you, and that is the way you are read," Snapjudge bumbled back in his mind, angrily and uneasily. "What, has another one challenged my Prejudice today? How could I miss two prescients within a quarter of an hour? Can it be only coincidence that there should be a pair of intuitives in one afternoon?"

"Well, it's plain that the fates of these two are connected, and it's just as plain that both of these are a little bit stubborn about accepting their fate. I've wondered about this irrational stubbornness where I've met it in others. And a good Prejudicial Analyst isn't supposed to have to wonder about very many things."

Jim Snapjudge stopped at the local station in beautiful downtown Kronstadt Ohio. He was to appear for a minute interview on 1n~evuiews with Agnes at three oh seven o'clock, so he walked into the sending area at exactly three oh seven.

"Oh!" said Agnes, "I thought you would be late."

"Any Prejudicial Analyst could have told you I wouldn't be," Snapjudge said. "My personality profile should indicate to anyone capable of understanding that I am always on time, exactly on time."

"Mr. Snapjudge, you are here to defend your profession of Prejudicial Analyst against public opinion which has always held that there is something malodorous and crippling about prejudice," Agnes began the

interview.

“I am not here to defend but to attack,” Snapjudge said. “I am here to attack the hypocrisy of those who would prejudge prejudice. To be without prejudice is to be without roots or trunk. But I doubt if you even know the meaning of ‘prejudice’, Agnes.”

“I know the original literal meaning on which you have built such a house of hate, yes,” Agnes maintained stoutly. “And I know the true, developed, organic meaning that now obtains. This is the shriveling, defaming, hating, murderous assault on all that is decent; and you are a shriveled, defaming, hating, murderous person.”

“Ah, you’re foaming at the mouth, Agnes. You should wear a bib. I repeat that I attack the hypocrisy of those who prejudge prejudice, you being one of them. You are categorically against all prejudices (prejudgments) of any sort, and yet on this one thing you prejudge more strongly than any Prejudicial Analyst that I have ever known. Really, why are you against intelligently based prejudice?”

“Because it is fallible, because it is sometimes inaccurate, because it’s presumptive.”

“What isn’t? Are not all judgments fallible? Working infallibility is the most that can ever be obtained.”

“No. The Final Judgment is not fallible. I’d almost wish it were this moment so I could hear it find against you, find against you forever. You really wouldn’t call yourself a fair and unbiased man, would you now, Mr. Snapjudge?”

“You are prejudging the Final Judgment, Agnes, you who are so strongly against any prejudging? And, yes, I would absolutely call myself a fair and unbiased man. Even minded, that’s me; always a bad word for everyone.”

Snapjudge felt that the quip didn’t quite go over. The people who are against prejudice are against humor also.

The buzzer sounded, and the minute Interview with Agnes was over with. A minute was what Agnes said it was, and now she was interviewing a spokesman for the Ethical Party.

Walking in the street again, Snapjudge was assailed by second thoughts once more. “What if I’m wrong?” something wailed in him. But a Prejudicial Analyst cannot admit that he is wrong in his basic, so Snapjudge put this doubt resolutely out of his mind.



The expert Prejudicial Analyst has two most useful aids which, however, are still no tin very good repute. It is unfortunate that they are not, for as repositories of information they are overflowing vessels. These two main props are Phrenology and Folk Belief.

Phrenology (that old House of Our Fathers) is back again and it has been repaired to a high degree of validity. It is the reading of character and predilections and life determination from the head bumps and head shapes and from other related evidence. There is the analysis of the skull itself and of the plastic-fleshy covering of the skull. And then the shape and disposition of the whole body comes into the game. A recent expansion of the field is kinetic phrenology which embraces the movements as well as the shape and texture of a person. Even the lay and whorl of the hair (Negro hair, Jew hair, Slav hair, Indian hair) indicates what a person must be. Hair on the back of the second phalange sections of the fingers, that indicates cruelty; and a great lot of hair there indicates outright sadism. Hair in the ears, that indicates doltishness and animalism. And the feet, the feet! They would tell almost every thing if they were allowed to. The Prejudicial Analyst is at such a disadvantage when people go shod! And yet a practiced analyst can tell enough. There are some things that can never be hidden by leather or plastic.

Surface marks on the skin! There are little weather-marks or crinkle marks on the faces and throats of all persons, and these grow with age. These are the nexus marks, usually starred, five-pointed for Christians, six-pointed for Jews. Then there are the un-starred, diamond shapes of Negroes, and the lotus marks of the Hindustani people. These marks indicate both the apparent and the hidden blood of examined persons. The marks do not lie, but individual persons sometimes lie. And yet it's a fact that one without a strong spirit of prejudice is scarcely able to interpret these marks at all.

And ears, ears! No Prejudicial Analyst can ever have enough of ears. No good man ever had bad ears. There are criminal ears, there are lazy ears, there are the itching ears that are mentioned in Scripture. And there is a human characteristic that must go with every ear form. There is an invariance here.

And there are many extensions of the simple science of Phrenology. Every extension of the body is an extension of the science of the body. Dogs belonging to persons, for an instance, are extensions of those

persons, and they are to be analyzed as ancillaries and extensions. These and other appurtenances, living or unliving (a house belonging to a person may be such an appurtenance) give absolute indication of a person's character and direction.

So many things to be considered, dewlaps, throat-swellings, bull-humps on the backs of necks, the shape of a voice which is the shape of a thorax projected into the air, grizzled eyebrows (especially when they are Manx or Welsh), these all will tell very much to one who is truly devoted to Prejudice.

That which has been will be again, and again, and again. When a correlation has been discovered to exist in one hundred persons it will also exist in the one hundred and first.

And names, names! Names are shapes and textures and movements, they are short-hand representation of living persons. And they are also evocative magic. So it is that names form the transition between Phrenology and Folk Belief which is the other strong limb of the Prejudicial Analyst.

It is hard to comprehend just how very many things names may tell to a Prejudicial Analyst. But how the Analyst himself tells names is the easy part. It is almost to cheat, to take the cross-section from the small end of the log. Even to the student analyst it is almost the case that every person comes with his name printed boldly in plain letters on his forehead.

Take new-born twin calves that look exactly alike. There is no possible way that one can tell them apart until they are named. But name them, and each will immediately look like his name to such a degree that it becomes quite easy to tell them apart. This is not imagination. Ask any farmer or small rancher who has kept a modest herd (not many over a hundred animals) so that each animal may be known by appearance and name. Appearance and name will interact very strongly.

But humans grow much more in the direction of their names than do animals. Consider persons hearing the names of Clarence, Jerome, Horace, Freddy, Eustace, Emily, Rex, Alice, Ralph, Agatha, Isidor, Mona, Dwight. You get the idea? One asks the names of these people only out of politeness. One knows their names, for they are spelled out on the very faces of them.

This most striking trick of the Prejudicial Analysts, naming names of persons never seen before, is really the easiest trick in the whole

repertory. Anyone can do it. You can do it yourself with a week's practice.

But there are other tricks that are not easy. The divining of a stranger's total personality and total life, past, present, and future, from such evidence as is immediately apparent is not an easy thing. But it can be done. It requires almost slavish adherence to analogy and precedent. Such divining requires acceptance of the formula 'What type has done, the individual will do.' It requires uncommon sense, and a man-trap memory for millions of details. It requires assurance. It requires confidence. It requires the synthesis of all these things. And it requires, for it to be done with a sparkle, reasoned happiness on the part of the Analyst.

But Jim Snapjudge was unhappy without apparent reason. It couldn't be anything preying on — What? Are things back where they started?

Yes, they are. Jim Snapjudge, in an uncommon fit of mind-wandering, had walked completely around beautiful downtown Kronstadt and he was back where he had started. But now he knew why he was there. In the building above him was the office and clinic of his friendly enemy and formidable competitor, Jonah Himbrecher, the other leading Prejudicial Analyst in town.

Doctors must sometimes go to other doctors. Even lawyers go to other lawyers in certain circumstances. Priests go to other priests to be confessed: even Popes must do so, except Leo the First for whom an angel provided that service yearly. Gamblers visit other gamblers. And Prejudicial Analysts must sometimes, for the preserving of their equilibrium, consult with others of their kind. Jim Snapjudge went up to see the other Analyst, Jonah Himbrecher.

"Good afternoon, Jim," Jonah said, and subvocally he added "Damned Wasp!"

"Good afternoon, Jonah," Snapjudge gave his greeting, and voicelessly he added "Damned Jew-bug!" This subliminal name-calling was only a little ritual knife-whetting that they used. It certainly didn't imply unfriendliness.

"I suppose that you, as a foresightly person, have made arrangements to turn all your cases and clients over to some other Analyst in the event of your timely (for to an Analyst nothing is untimely) death" Jonah asked matter-of-factly. "I suppose that you can make this transfer by a single act that is as simple as jerking a draw-string. I rather hope that the transfer

will be made to myself.”

“Sure, it’s to you, Jonah,” Snapjudge said. “You’re the only other Prejudicial Analyst in town. Has my death become timely?”

“Oh yes. Tonight.”

“All right.”

Jim Snapjudge made a phone call. It was an act as simple as jerking a draw-string, and by that act he turned over all his cases and clients to Jonah Himbrecher.

“Well, that’s fate,” Snapjudge said after he had completed the call. “There’s no arguing with fate. But you might as well sketch out my end for me. Just how will I end, Jonah?”

“Wet,” said Jonah Himbrecher.

2

“It is he that saith not ‘Kismet’; it is he that knows not Fate; It is Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey at the gate!”

Lepanto, Chesterton

“I’ve observed too many persons on their death day for me to have any doubt in your case,” Jonah said. It was almost as if he had something to defend.

“Oh, I haven’t any doubt,” Snapjudge said humbly. “My fate is fixed as is all fate. But I wonder how it came upon me so suddenly.”

“The indications of sudden disaster have always been there, I suppose,” Jonah said. “They’re written plainly everywhere, on the backs of your hands, and in the wide swing of your eyes. They’re in your shapeless gestures, particularly that emphasized tossing of your head. They’re in the dilation of your nostrils. But you’re a bit of a special person, an Analyst, a Prophet, almost an exception; so the signs and causes were scattered with you and at first they did not have to come together. They’ve done it though. There is now a correspondence and constellation of all your evil signs, and they cannot be reversed.”

“Jonah, how do we really do it? Isn’t there something more to it? I mean the sudden and true intuitions. Sometimes they seem to go beyond the evidence.”

“Oh, the intuitions are merely the culmination of the evidence that we receive without consciously acknowledging it. This evidence burgeons, or it festers, in our unconscious. Then the intuitions explode out of that evidence that we had consciously overlooked. But the intuitions are valid

and in the true line, Jim. Our prediction tactics cannot be in error. There is a mystique that requires their accuracy.”

“I don’t know, Jonah, I just don’t know. There’s been a feeling coming over me all afternoon that maybe, someday, somewhere, we should give someone the benefit of the doubt.”

“The benefit of what doubt, Jim? We Prejudicial Analysts cannot have doubts. Were we not certain, we would be mighty shaky. If we did not stand on sacred privilege, we would be in danger of being ridiculous.”

“It just seems to me, Jonah (and forgive me, for I’m a distraught man speaking on the last day of his life), that we may sometimes be too arrogant in some of this.”

“Arrogance is a requirement for us, Jim. Let them know that there are still Prophets in Israel. We are the latter-day prophets, and as such we will always be in danger of being stoned by the people. And, walking always in this danger, it is automatic that we should be arrogant. We have to be right. There is an inerrancy about properly marshalled evidence, about assembled Folk Belief, about phrenological accumulation. What they indicate has to be. We grow out of the past, and the name of that past is Prejudgement or Prejudice. Today’s one-inch twig growth at the top of the tree does not give the total profile or representation of that tree. Without rational prejudice, which is the solid sense of things past, we would like foolish gooney birds waking up into a world with only a present dimension.”

“Or little ducks each day,” said Jim Snapjudge. “But might we not sometimes suspend judgment?”

“No, Jim. Suspended judgment is a little bit like suspended animation,” Jonah explained. “Somehow we might like it to be there as a workable alternative if things got too rough. But there’s no proof at all that either will ever work. Better to forget about them.”

“Does Fate have to be final?”

“Certainly. It wouldn’t be Fate if it weren’t final.”

“And yet there is the possibility that Agnes was partly right,” Snapjudge said dreamily. “The strongest case against Prejudicial Analysis isn’t that it is unfair or hate-filled (why should such a calculating and impersonal thing and the Analysis bother to be unfair or hateful to fragments of its own data?). the case against it is that it is sometimes mistaken, though by its nature it can never admit that it is mistaken; and

that it is always premature. It's as though we were telling a situation or a person 'You can't get out of your cage. Don't try.' And that situation or person should protest 'I want to try anyhow. Isn't it allowed to try?' Arid then we would exclude all chance with a final statement 'No, it is not allowed to try.' From one viewpoint, a case could be made that this is unfair. I don't know whether it would be a strong case or not. What are you doing to me, man?"

Jonah Himbrecher was doing something with his hands, on or behind the shoulders of Jim Snapjudge. He seemed to be unfastening an invisible something, probably a garment. Then he drew it off and folded it carefully with his ritual hands. The object was still invisible, and yet its shape, including the very fancy fringes of it, could be guessed from the movement of those Jonah hands.

"I am removing your Prophet's Mantle, Snapjudge," Jonah said then in a liturgical voice. "It is best removed some hours before the death, for the prophetic faculty is already lost when the doubting and questioning begin. When one dies and the Mantle has not been symbolically removed, then the trees in the sacred talking groves (there are still some in nearby Scioto County) will wail out 'A Prophet is dead!' And I hate to hear grown trees cry.

"Do you ever go down to Rhineland?"

"Seldom. Sometimes I go down to check on my analyses of persons and their fates. I may go down this evening to check on two such fates."

"Yes. You will go down there this evening. That is where you will die."

"But what if I do not go down there this evening, Jonah? How will I die if I avoid the scene of my death? What could force me to go down to Rhineland this evening?"

"Snapjudge, you have ceased to be a Prejudicial Analyst, you have ceased to be a Prophet. Otherwise you would not be able to ask such questions. The backs of your hands will force you to go down to Rhineland this evening, and that wide swing of your eyes will force you. Your broken-patterned gestures will force you particularly that tossing of your head. The dilation of your nostrils will force you. The way you rock on your feet will force you, and the way you flex your knees. Your chewing of your lower lip will force you: that would do it by itself. You will go down there tonight and you will die there because you are named Jim Snapjudge, and that is the way that Jim Snapjudge will end."

“Yes, yes, I see that there’s no way out. Ah, just what is it that we lose, Jonah, when we cease to be Prejudicial Analysts and Prophets in our last hours?”

“Purity of concept is what is lost. That is the guard: and when that guard retires, then other things crowd in by the common gate. Among these things which that noisome complex called popular opinion has associated with Prejudice in times past, and that is still associates a little bit today. But it is only when Prejudice ceases to be true Prejudice, when the judgement in its prejudgment fails in soundness, that unfairness and hate and bias and prematurity can creep in. Now good afternoon to you, Snapjudge, and abide as well as you can in the concept of Prejudice as Work of Art.”

“Aye, Prejudice as work of art — when it works,” Jim Snapjudge said, and the fallen prophet went out from that office and clinic.

As evening had already come on, Jim Snapjudge went down to that shoddy, waterfront district named Rhineland. He went to the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House which is to be found where Elm Street ends on the River. And there was something gone wrong, or gone different, with the whole Rhineland district.

It was, of course, still shoddy in every detail; but the whole thing didn’t add up quite as shoddy as expected. It was bright, rather; it was almost gay; it had a sort of freshness, almost newness about it, and nothing new had come to Rhineland for decades.

“What will you have, Mr. Snapjudge?” asked the proprietor of the Ruination. He was cashier and waiter and bartender and his name was George Rue-something. Jim Snapjudge had lost his prophetic facility and could no longer finish the name of the man. But should it now run in the other direction?

“And how do you know my name?” Snapjudge asked the proprietor.

“Why, don’t you know that every bartender is a Prejudicial Analyst as well as a Prophet?” George R. asked. “Oh, by the way, this needn’t be your last meal. That is just a sticky notion that you have. You can break it. You can fight it. Nobody has to die till he’s ready.”

“I’m ready,” Snapjudge said. “There’s no going against fate.”

“The common people go against it every day, Snapjudge. They fight it. They pull it off its high horse and roll it in the dust. It is only the fine people who are too easily intimidated by the old fraud. Ah well then, why

don't you have a meal good enough for the last meal of the rankest murderer? The snap-turtle is good, the crawfish tails are good. We don't have shad roe today but we do have mud-cat roe. The calf brains aren't bad. The hot-cakes and kidneys are really for the people who cross the river from Kentucky, but there's no law against anyone else wanting them. The sand-bar onions are about what you'd expect from wild onions this late in the season. The coffee is good by strong. Don't try to dilute it with more water. It's the water that makes it so strong. And this isn't Kentucky Bourbon, whatever the bottle may say. This is Ohio Rye Whisky and I made it myself. It's good. We've got sour-milk bread and corn-cob bread. And crab-apple cobbler."

"With levity sauce, I suppose. Just fix me something good to eat something strong to drink," Jim Snapjudge said uncertainly. Always before he had known what to order in a place. A Prejudicial Analyst could divine the qualities of any food in the environs just as well as he could read the character and proclivities of any person around. But Snapjudge had lost his powers.

"Gas lights here?" Snapjudge asked, though it was obvious that they did have gas lights. "It seems very bright in here for gas. Do they cost you much?"

"Nothing," George R said. "I use river gas. I drove a couple one inch pipes with sand points on them down a few feet here, and I have all the gas I want. And I washed the big mirror. That's what makes it seem so bright. It fools your fate too. Any change in a big mirror throws them into confusion."

"You'll not turn fate aside with humor," Snapjudge said sourly. "I always have," George R said. "I've got almost everything fixed up now. All but the broken plank out front in the board walk that goes out over the water. I should fix that. Somebody will get a bad fall there. And the board is so noisy that it spooks people."

"The broken plank is noisy?"

"Yes, noisy. It carries on all the time. Always mumbling and grumbling."

The dusky young lady who may have been Teresa Tuesdaychild came in and took a table. She was still dressed brightly, and her primary colors had taken on an exciting glitter under the gas lights. Jim Snapjudge had never been quite sure what her ruination would consist of. And now,



having lost his power, he couldn't project beyond what he had known earlier in the day. He believed that her fate, her ruination, would be caused by a gun misfiring and exploding in her face. This would be the second shot from that gun. The first shot would have killed a man.

"What is she anyhow, white on black or black on white?" Snapjudge asked George R testily. He found Teresa very attractive, but he was somehow indignant against her.

"She is hue upon color, tone upon timbre, shade upon sheen. She is a primary chromatic of high saturation and high brilliance. A jewel, I forget which kind: a flame garnet."

"I don't like her. I haven't any reason. Until this afternoon I did not like or dislike anything or anybody. And I always had a reason for my thoughts. She will come to her ruination in this place tonight."

"No, she will not. Young girls seeking ruination go to the rooming house next door. Not here." George R sat with Jim Snapjudge when he wasn't busv. Now he rose to wait on Teresa.

She asked for the table to be set for three, and she seemed to order for three. Quickly there was the new a bright aroma of food that was better than snap-turtle or mud-cat roe or calf brains or sand-bar onions. There was pungent and juicy rack of rash ribs somewhere, and hot river-boat rolls. There was an olfactory presence of noble coffee of which the water was not the strongest element. And there was the curling whiff of Ohio Rye Whisky. Pleasurable promises all. George R came and sat with Jim Snapjudge again for a moment.

"Why have you the dogs skulking around on the floor yet when you have brightened up everything else somehow?" Snapjudge asked.

"There are no dogs here," George R assured. "I got rid of all of them two weeks since. Those are merely some of their shadows that are left over for a while. Yes, they skulk and lurk, but they are only shadows."

"Of coming events?"

"No, I don't think so. But you can see anything you don't want to in those shadows. Mostly, I believe, you will see yourself."

There was urbane laughter, there was natural gentry laughter all about: and there was the sound of good music somewhere in another room. That's where even good music should always be, at some distance away, or in another room at the very least. And now Jim Snapjudge had been presented with his last meal, rash ribs that stood and reigned, hot

rolls made with buttermilk and honey, pepper that — Godfrey Halskragen came into the Ruination Bar and Grill and Gandy-House. He joined Teresa Tuesdaychild at her table. Now the two fates were together, and they had only to wait for the assassin, probably the person of the big Buckaroo.

“You will have at least one killing here tonight. I always watch to prevent trouble.”

“Yes. That last man who came in, that man who is sitting with the colorful girl named Teresa, he will be shot to death here tonight. I have seer this in a valid vision. His name is probably Godfrey. He will be shot by a jealous man whose jealousy is quite complex. I never believed in mixing the primary colors myself.”

“You are not talking about primary colors at all, Snapjudge. You are talking about achromatic colors,” George R- said. “But you are mistaken. Somehow you have seen it wrong. Or else the vision itself has changed slightly, but to change the effect completely. The violence will not happen.”

“A valid vision cannot be changed even slightly,” Snapjudge insisted. “A fate once set is absolutely certain.”

“No, Snapjudge, no,” George R- contradicted. “Listen to me. In every town there is one small section where fate is not securely established; where things that are absolutely bound to happen will sometimes happen in a slightly different manner; where recompense is demanded and obtained for all unbalanced things. When towns were walled, these sections were always outside the walls. When pales were garrisoned, these sections were always beyond the pales. In Kronstadt Ohio this unruly and slightly mystic section is named Rhineland.”

“Look at the way those two talk,” Snapjudge was saying, and he was referring to Teresa and Godfrey. “He is trying to seduce her. And the assassin who will arrive soon believes that that man has already seduced her. Those two, soon three, I don’t like.”

Actually it was Teresa Tuesdaychild who was trying to seduce Godfrey Halskragen. And this is what she was saying, softly and intensely, in her highly chromatic voice:

“What do you owe the P & C Rotary Valve Company, Godfrey? yes, they have paid you well, but you have given them the good value for what they have paid you. If you must move from Gallipolis to Kronstadt to

move one step forward, why not move two steps? Change to Simpkins Great Solar Valve Company. It is more than a verbalism when we say 'valves are Simpler with Simpkins'. You say that Irene is afraid that this would be a less friendly town? I'll phone her tonight if you wish. I'm sure I can convince her that people are friendly in Kronstadt. I know I can convince you that the Simpkins people are friendly. When Buck gets here he can show you some figures on your projected earnings. They will be substantially above anything that P & C could pay. I will be quite brazen about this. You have a real talent for valve sales, and we intend to recruit you."

"Teresa, I will simply have to think about it a little longer."

"Godfrey, that man over there, I don't like him at all." (She meant Jim Snapjudge.) "He eye-balled me this afternoon. I felt that he was trying to read me. I felt that he was reading me all wrong. That long nose of his and those bugged-out eyes, they're intolerable. He should do something about them."

"What could he do? Does not Scripture tell us that, by taking thoughts we cannot add one cubit to our stature?"

"I'm not talking about adding a cubit to his stature. I'm talking about him shortening that damned nose and unbugging his eyes. Don't tell me that he can't do it! He can. He's running a chilly fever now and I hope he dies from it. But whatever kind of fever he runs, he's too cool to go in for hating. I'm not. I hate a guy who won't hate. I hate him. I think he's a Jew or an Armenian or a Limey or one of those."

"Lady, I hate him too," said a man at the next table. "He looks right through you. He's got some kind of business where he gives ratings on people to companies that hire them. I bet he never gave a good rating in his life. I think he comes from up in Middlesex County."

"I hate all those middle sex people," said the lady with the man at the next table. "I don't care if they are consenting adults. How are you going to raise children properly when people like that are always mo~~ng in next door to you. I think that that man's one of them too. He sure looks like it."

A jolt, a momentous jolt! That was only someone coming through the front door? No, it wasn't only someone; it was a menace, an assassin, a personage, a key person in the drama. The very air was freighted with threat.

“It’s the killer, the corsair, the Buckaroo,” Jim Snapjudge breathed; and his hackles were rising. (Until this afternoon he had forgotten that he had hackles.) “This is Murder, this is Fate, this is my last Analysis vindicated. Here comes death and ruination.”

“Oh, it’s only Buck,” said George Ruination the proprietor. “He’s a loud one, yes, and a comic. But there’s no real harm in him at all.”

“This will be loud,” said Jim Snapjudge, “but it will not be comic.”

Shadows of gone dogs or coming events were lurking and skulking about the floor, too low to be clarified by the gas lights. A river loon sounded outside. The Buckaroo stood very tall and bulky and dark and formidable, and he imposed silence on the room. There was a threatening bulge in his right-hand coat pocket and the monicker of that bulge was ‘murder’. Curiously there was another and only slightly smaller bulge in his left-hand coat pocket; and it was the left-hand bulge that the Buckaroo now drew out and held awkwardly, for he did not seem to be left-handed.

At his table, Godfrey Halskragen regarded the Buckaroo with paling eyes and wary ears: (it is the ears that tell the Prejudicial Analyst so icy, ah, the nervous, waiting lobe, the graceful tragus); and the very shadow of an amoebic wink disfigured that apprehensive face.

Teresa Tuesdaychild watched the Buckaroo with a dusky grin, but a little shiver ran right through that grin. She was either uneasy or excited by the appearance of the Buck. All sorts of vagrant and subtle hues played in and Out of her primary colors.

The music in the other room had changed its motif. Now it was menace music and it built to a climaxing mood. Then the Buckaroo exploded in voice and action.

“Caught the two of you here!” he howled, and a not-quite-right gun was in his left hand. “Die, pig, die.”

“Shriek!” cried Teresa.

“Bang!” cried the explosion. And the gun-shot hit Godfrey Halskragen in the face and head.

Gore! Bright red gore, dark red gore, serum-colored gore, brain gore all over Godfrey! A moan, probably a death moan, from the bespattered man with the gushing head! Smokey smell of blood and of burnt flesh!

What? Here was Fate vindicated indeed. But could so much blood come from one pistol shot?

“It’s wrong, something has gone wrong!” Jim Snapjudge was complaining in a voice that had gone reedy. “The blood-smell is wrong, and it’s too clotted. There cannot be that much splattered out of one little bullet hole. And the gun should have cried ‘Bang!’ The man shouldn’t have cried ‘Bang!’ Fate will not be mocked. Make it right somebody or there will be terrible retribution.”

“Damn you, Buck!” Godfrey Halskragen howled at the big Buckaroo. “This is my best and only suit. Yeah, and it’s my best and only face.”

“Bang! Bang!” Buck cried out the explosion noises again, but the big water pistol with its load of Old Hickory Barbecue Sauce and Vinegar and Ketchup had jammed. Buck applied great power and fervor to it. Then it exploded into the primariest color of them all and completely covered the face and head and hair of Teresa Tuesdaychild with a melange of writhing red sauce.

“Ruined,ruined, now I can never marry!” she whooped. Then there was hilarity and happy pandemonium throughout the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy-House! Most of the people who came there knew the Buckaroo and always they awaited an elaborate visual joke of some sort from him. Towels were brought to the victims, and the chortling laughter of all present was a full thing.

But not of all present either. There was one person there who was not touched by the high comedy of the low joke. Jim Snapjudge was in a gibbering, whey-faced shock.

“It is wrong, it is all wrong,” he moaned. “The shadows show the way it should be, but the primaries have it all wrong. Look, people, do as the shadows do.

The shadows — the three shadows: — one of them was supine on the floor and bleeding a little stream of shadow-blood from a small hole in the head; one of them was sitting on the floor and rocking and moaning out of an exploded face; and the third shadow had drawn itself up into an impossible tallness and was shaking and swelling with fear and shock with the frustrated attempt to flee (but the tall shadow could not flee while its primary remained.)

And the three primaries were cleaning themselves up with an air of great amiability and gaiety. Jim Snapjudge went resolutely over to the faulting trio.

“Since we all of us are a part of Fate, then we all have the duty to

guard the province of Fate,” he said pedantically. “You, Buckaroo, you still have the proper gun, the real gun, in your right-hand coat pocket. Take it out.”

“What, long-nose, what?” Buck asked startled, but he took the proper gun out and held it in his huge right hand.

“Oh, you’ve brought it, Buck,” Godfrey said. “I’ll give it a good going-over. I told you I was a gun-smith by hobby. If it acts as if it wasn’t to hang fire then it’s dangerous. I’ll check over the whole firing mechanism.”

“You, Buckaroo,” Snapjudge said. “You know that you have two bullets in that gun. Shoot Godfrey in the head with the first one and kill him. You know that that is what the fate and prejudice of both of you have ordained that you should do. Then try to shoot Teresa in the head with the second one. It will hang fire. Try it again, and try it the third time. The chamber of the gun will explode then, and the face of Teresa will explode from the same action. And you will be badly injured yourself. I have already seen all this happen in a valid and prejudicial vision. Now do it, and let this terrible and ridiculous mistake be righted.

“What, what, what?” the bewildered Buckaroo jabbered.

“Give me that gun!” Godfrey ordered, and with a rapid movement he took the gun from the Buckaroo. “Damn you, Buck, for a minute there you looked as though you might do it. Oh damn those spooky eyes of yours!” he yelped in relief as he broke the gun and unloaded it.

“Whoop, har, har, whar, whar whar, you thought I’d do it!” Buck chortled and howled with giant joy (was it possible that there were touches of horror and relief in that boisterous joy?), “Man, you should have seen the spooky eyes on you!”

“Little long-nose, little bug-eyes,” Teresa was saying to Jim Snapjudge. “You get out of here! Get a long ways out of here! We hate you. We hate everything about you and your insanity. Mr. Ruination come throw this damned whey-faced bum out!”

And other people there said other abusive things to and about Jim Snapjudge. The common people have always understood the character and use of prejudice, and they had strong prejudice against Snapjudge. Prejudice is a tool-weapon, honed for thousands of years, that is designed to cut a guy down and cut a guy up. And it will do this every time if it is employed with determination and steadiness.

So George Ruination had to throw Jim Snapjudge out of the

establishment, but he was not too rapid about it. Holding Snapjudge by collar and the seat of the pants, he allowed him a last colloquy.

“You know that the man should have been shot to death, and the face of the girl should have been ruined,” Snapjudge said in a begging voice. “That was the judgment and decision of prejudicial fate from the beginning of the world.”

“Oh, I know that, Snapjudge,” George said, “but I also know that fate can be subverted in a few neighborhood of this world. As to Rhineland here, this is the case: Originally God had jurisdiction over Ohio and the Devil had jurisdiction over Kentucky; and Rhineland was then a part of Kentucky. Then the course of the river changed on one stormy night and Rhineland ended up on the Ohio side. Neither God nor the Devil ever laid claim to Rhineland in its new situation though, and fate has had a very insecure time here with no higher jurisprudence to appeal to. I imagine that a similar account could be given of most of the other unruly sections of other towns. Well, on your way!” And George Ruination, swinging Jim Snapjudge by his collar and the seat of his pants, threw him out the door and into the night in a beautiful arching trajectory.

“Watch out for the broken plank. A man can get a bad fall there!” Ruination called after the flying Snapjudge as he slammed the door.

And Jim Snapjudge did get a bad fall at the broken plank; he fell right through the wooden walkway that went out over the water. He fell into that water that is called Ruination’s Duck Pond and Cess-Pool; it is a small, splintered-off back-water of the Ohio River. And Snapjudge drowned there.

That had been his fate and prejudice from the beginning. But his original fate hadn’t included that part about him been thrown out by his collar and the seat of his pants.

That broken plank was out of a tree that had been cut in Scioto County, Ohio; and the tree had belonged to one of those sacred, talking groves. Now the talking plank began to moan ‘A Prophet is dead! A Prophet is dead!’; but nobody in the Ruination Bar and Grill and Candy House paid any attention. That plank had been a noisy nuisance for a long time

And on Ruination’s Duck Pond, the little ducks, waking up into a new world the next day, found the body of Jim Snapjudge at first morning. They gaggled and splashed around Snapjudge. They asked him questions

in their way, and the first friend they had found in the new world that day.

They did not find his nose too long or his eyes too bugged. They did not find his visage too bloated or purpled. And they did not discover him to be either cold or unlikable.

They were unprejudiced little ducks.



## THE HAND WITH ONE HUNDRED FINGERS

### 1.

*We are the folks esteemed and loved  
By nobody any more.  
We are the cloaked and veiled and gloved  
And we're rotten to the core.*

— *Rotten Peoples' Rollicks*

The Hand with One Hundred Fingers was pretty much in control of things then. It enhanced persons and personalities, or it degraded them, for money, for whim, or for hidden reasons. And what it did to them was done effectively everywhere and forever.

Julius Runnymede had had several afflictions. He had a speech impediment; he was shy, he was inept, he was a bungler. Then, while he was still a young man, he inherited a medium-sized fortune. He decided to invest it in a new personality. He went to one of the leading firms of Person-Projectors, and they cured his disabilities almost immediately. His bungling and ineptitude and shyness and speech afflictions were transmuted into assets. He became one of the finest orators in the Fourth Congressional District, and a bright future lay before him. All thanks to the Hand!

The one hundred fingers of the hand were the one hundred Person-Projector firms in the comprehensive union. They controlled all rulers of all countries, and all parliaments and congresses for the reason that they were able to manufacture presidents and premiers and prime ministers and assemblies (and other power-groups behind the formal assemblies) out of common human material. And they were able to destroy as well as manufacture.

Alice Jacoby was an aspiring young actress, but she had bad acting habits. She popped her eyes and she popped her teeth in the intensity of her theatrical emotions. Her voice was adenoidal, and were it not for its adenoidal element it would have been perfectly flat. She wasn't pretty, and she surely wasn't in any way compelling. She had about as much sex as a green watermelon.

But there were at least two people who loved her and who knew that

something drastic would have to be done for her. One of these was her father who mortgaged his firm to get money to help her. Another one was her uncle Jake Jacoby who mortgaged his auction and cattle business to get money for her.

Alice paid the money to a firm of Person-Projectors, one of the hundred fingers of the Hand. The people-engineers of this firm enhanced her personality. And immediately Alice was in demand as an actress. She was known. Nearly everyone in the world had at least a subliminal and unconscious recognition of her.

She still popped her eyes and her teeth when she tried to emote, but now these seemed to be enchanting gestures. Her voice was still adenoidal, but now it seemed to be ravishingly adenoidal. She still wasn't pretty, but now she was compelling. And now she was as sexy as a fully ripe watermelon. All hail to the Hand again!

There were three steps. First a person did not have certain advantages. Then the person seemed to have acquired them. And then it was learned that there was no difference between seeming to have special attributes and really having them.

A person's personality was plotted and planned. Then the personal or aura signature was attached to an updated and almost presentable electronic personality. This new electronic personality was let onto world television for only one-fiftieth of a second; but that was time enough to create a consensus and to give a resonance back. The weight of members of participating persons was most important in this. An unchallenged (and unconscious) world consensus of the electronic personality was formed. Oh, there was a bit more to it than that, about a minute and a half more to it than that. If it were too simple then everybody could set up in the Person-Projector business and reap fortunes.

Well, if it worked for Alice Jacoby, why wouldn't it work for everybody? It would, it would. Almost everybody who was able to raise a small or medium-sized fortune had now become a Corrected-Consensus-Projected-Personality. It worked for Wisteria Manford, it worked for Peter Hindman, it worked for Hector Gibbons. It worked for quite a few millions of person, but it would be a distraction to list them all.

The Persons-Projectors brought down as many persons as they elevated (to give a proper balance to things); but the downfallen are hardly noticed at all. And everybody noticed the uplifted.

“The century-long battle over the nature of reality is finished. The ‘Nature of Reality’ lost. Reality is seen to be no more than a mirage, a heat-inversion false appearance. No one has ever really slaked his thirst in the bogus waters of reality. But almost everyone has imagined that he has. And the imagining is just as good. It was once said that subjectivity and objectivity were opposite sides of the same coin. Now we know that they are the same reverse side of the same coin, and the face of the coin is blank.

“Reality is what enough people believe that it is. Reality is a projected conditionality. And a person is exactly what the current, projected consensus of that person shows him to be. There is no more to it than that. It was noticed, more than a hundred years ago, that people in group pictures tend to look alike; that is to say, they became persons of a particular consensus. It was noticed that persons in crowds take on the look of that particular crowd; and that persons in demented or rabid crowds lose all individual characteristics and come to look almost exactly alike.

“Soon after these first realizations, a group of men (they were then believed to be a bunch of fox-faced phonies, but we now know that they were a noble assembly of the media lords themselves) undertook the creation and projection of artificial personalities. It was they believed that ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ were somehow in opposition, which we now know to be untrue. This was a praiseworthy electronic manipulation which paralleled the genetic manipulation which began at about the same time. So, by introducing ‘new-date projection’ to attach to certain persons, by using old-fashioned folk interaction newly directed, by employing feedback from that interaction, by adding the ‘coloration’ technique, people could be stabilized into their true and valid forms. This would work for anything. Inanimate objects, and even the sun and the moon, could likewise be converted into new and clarified forms by these techniques; and they will be.

## 2.

*“We have reality now. We never had it before because of diverse viewpoints. The modern psycho-resolution-projection movement has begun to move with electronic speed and spread, and with exponential growth.”*

*Notes on the History of the Theory of Projected Persons.  
—Jonathan Fomry Bierce*

Crispin and Sharon Babcock had once seemed to be in love. What they were in now, with the arrival of reality, was uncertain; but the old ‘in love’ business was shown to have had no reality. Probably they were no more than ‘associated persons with prejudice’ now.

In that earlier time, though, they had both seemed to be quite attractive in all ways, and well fitted to each other. They had even seemed to have a clear physical and mental beauty. Their body measurements and weights would still reveal a fine proportion and beauty; but are you going to believe measurements or are you going to believe your own eyes and other senses? Crispin and Sharon were both clearly substandard now, and that is all there was to it.

It was because of his saying “I don’t believe that that is all there is to it” about a number of things that Crispin first got into trouble. By this lie showed himself to be an unconforming young man, unfaithful to the holy and historical disestablishment, and it was right that he should have gotten into trouble. And Sharon was tied so deeply into a complex of inanities that she was beyond correction.

“As long as we have each other, it will not matter what the rest of the world does or think,” Sharon said once.

“If we are faithful to ourselves and to each other, then we can survive even the ruination of the world,” Crispin had said. And both of them, for a while at least, had believed these things.

There had been a time when Crispin and Sharon had appeared to be successful in their lives. They had satisfaction and station and money and children and a happy home and fine friends. Or so they thought. They even had the illusion of a cup running over with sheer delight. Self-

deception must have been rampant in them. And when they finally had to face up to reality there was never a couple who opposed that facing-up so stubbornly or so unreasonably.

Both of them had refused to have personality-correctionprojection. They just didn't want it, they said. They didn't believe that they needed it, and they preferred things the way that they were. Refusals like theirs would tear the very fabric of the new society.

On the matter of giving up their children they had even defied the law. And they had refused for a long time to admit that their children were ugly and malodorous and moronic and repulsive.

"They are beautiful children, they are pleasant children, they are intelligent children, and they are good children," Sharon had insisted to an official in defiance of all reason. "We love them and they love us. Let us alone! We will maintain our own ways. We will walk in beauty and happiness as we have walked. You have no right to interfere!"

But the officials had the 'right of reality' to interfere. So the children were projected as officially deficient. And this projection, by definition, was the reality of the else. And Crispin and Sharon became more and more suspect after the termination of their children. Their attitude just wasn't good.

They retained, however, a sense of humor. But unsanctioned humor in bestial persons can be made to project itself badly. Their magic together had been very much weakened when it became the case that they couldn't stand to be too close to each other.

### 3.

*We are the sick, ungallant band  
Whose once bright step must lag.  
We are the people who live in the land  
Where even the buzzards gag.*

*-Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.*

Judge Roger Baluster had once been a magistrate, and later he been a manufacturer and business man. Still later he had been a tycoon. And that is where he broke it. Tycoons are so easy to type and tear.

And really had he ever had the nobility of character that a magistrate and a business man and a tycoon should have? What he did have was a long history of noncooperation with the person-projector firms.

As a young man Roger had been a crusading judge. He had crusaded against a complex of disintegrating things when they had been new and unestablished. And now when they were set and established they crusaded against Baluster to his ruination. But through the years he had become a man of much hidden wealth. He was a full-feathered bird and his plucking would take a long time.

In the beginning of it, he had refused to pay a firm that was in the person-projection business the simple monthly fee for 'Personality Updating and Maintenance.' This was petty of him, for he was a rich man.

Roger had had the look of an eagle. He had had pride and judgement and compassion. And humor. He had been (this is hard to believe in the light of his real character as it was later made manifest) adhered and liked and respected by almost everyone.

But he had refused to pay a simple fee. Well then, he would have to pay a complex fee of a made steeper sort. He was handed upward to larger hands. A bigger and more comprehensive firm in the person-projection business decided to take the enhancing of Baluster's personality in hand. And, unaccountably, he refused this offer also. He was placing himself above the law and above the community.

"Well then, Baluster, we will degrade your personality till you are held in universal contempt," the men of the first-class person-projector firm told him. "We will reveal a totally shabby person who is the valid 'you.' Of

the false image which you built for yourself nothing will remain. That is the way that things are, and there is only one side to things.”

“Aw, I think there is another side to this,” Roger Baluster said resolutely. “And I believe that something of what I built will remain. The ‘Inner Me’ will remain. “

“So then it will remain,” said those huckstering men of that firm. “But it will remain as it really is and not as you imagine it. We will give you a certain transparency now. There is nothing like letting the honest light of the day into a dark man like yourself. This transparency will be subliminal, of course, but it will be near universal. Everybody will be able to see into you in those faster-than-a-blink moments. And nobody’s ‘Inner Person’ is attractive. People will see you, in those instantaneous intervals that are too short to be recorded, with complete revulsion. They will see you as a dirty complex of entrails and incased organs. Yours will be the sharp and foul smell of blood and viscera and illegally opened persons. Other aspects of you will become other vile things, but the ‘inner you’ will have become a charnal house in its offensiveness.”

“There will be another sort of ‘Inner Me,’” Baluster insisted, “and you will not be able to touch that.”

“Whatever there is of you, we can touch it and bend it and twist it,” they said.

Well, they did touch and bend and twist every discoverable aspect of Judge Roger Baluster. They rotted every element of him, and they set his reputation into reeking corruption.

Once there had been the time when Roger Baluster had had the look of an eagle. Now he had the look of a buzzard or vulture. His pride and judgement had been destroyed utterly. His compassion and his humor had been horribly twisted. His appearance, whenever a glimpse could be got of it, was completely repulsive. As were so many now, Roger was cloaked and masked and swathed most of the time. But a really foul appearance can come through every swathing and speak to every sense.

They had disrupted Baluster’s household also. They had taken his wife away, and he couldn’t find out what they had done with her. They had destroyed two of his children, and they had turned the other two against him.

But he still had money, very much money, cannily hidden. That was what kept him alive. Money can buy a grudging sort of acknowledgement

as long as there is any of it left.

Silvester Sureman had gotten crossways with the firm that handled the maintenance of his personality. Before that, things had gone well with him. He had on the day of the misunderstanding, moved into a new suburban home, a sign of affluence. Silvester himself had a misunderstanding-removing business which he caned 'Roadsmoothers Inc.' He was a good relations man. He talked now to the men of the firm that handled the maintenance of his personality. "There is no need for misunderstanding here," he said. "I beg of you to take no action on this now. I beg you to take no action till tomorrow morning. Misunderstandings often disappear overnight." Silvester thought that he had them convinced, but something must have gone wrong. That firm did take action against Silvester that night while he slept. A nightshift man at the firm found a note on Silvester that had been written by a day-man. The day-man had forgotten to put a hold on that note. So the nightshift man routinely had Silvester destroyed in the area of his strength: his sureness in things, and his ability to remove misunderstandings. A split-second echo had gone and come from the world mind that this was a man who was Mr. Quagmire himself, the man who would always be bogged down in indecision and misunderstanding.

On the day of the misunderstanding, Silvester Sureman had phoned the Morning Enterprise to tell them to begin delivering the paper at his new house. "These changes take a little time," the man at the Enterprise said. "It may be the day after tomorrow morning before you receive the paper at your new place." "I am sure that it can be done by tomorrow morning," Sureman said. "With effort and understanding all things can be done quickly."

Then it was the next morning and Sureman went out from his new house early in the morning to get his paper. Yes, it was there. Or was it his? The paper was exactly midway between his house and the house next door. Did the people next door take the morning paper? The light was on there, so Sureman went and knocked on the door. A huge man with oversized eyes and rather on his face came and opened. (Those oversized eyes, the man either had a thyroid condition or he was a Groll's Troll.)

"Do you take the Morning Endeavor newspaper?" Silvester Sureman asked brightly.

"That is no possible business of yours," the man said bluntly. "No, I do



not take such a thing. What this neighborhood does not need is one more nut. Don't be one."

"Thank you, thank you," Sureman said, "I am just trying to prevent misunderstandings before they start." He patted the man on the shoulder and the man winced. How awkward of Sureman! Possibly the fellow was a Groll's Troll, and they are very touchy about being touched.

Sureman picked up the paper and sat at the little sidewalk bench in front of his house to read it. And after a while the huge, shaven man came out of the house next door. He seemed to be looking for something. Then he came over to Silvester Sureman and punched him in the nose and took the paper.

"I told you not to be a nut in this neighborhood," the man said. "Stealing my morning paper is in the order of being a nut."

"But you said that you didn't take the Morning Endeavor," Sureman said reasonably out of his bloody face.

"I don't," the huge man said. "This is the Morning Enterprise. There isn't any such paper as the Morning Endeavor."

The man started back into his house with the paper. Sureman had gotten his tongue twisted on the name, that was all. Oh, oh, that big man was coming back again!

That huge man came up to Silvester Sureman again and punched him in the nose so hard that he broke it.

"It's one thing to be a nut," the huge man said. "It's something else to be a nut with a worm in it. That last punch was because you have a worm in you."

And Silvester Sureman did have a worm in him. It rotted him and it ate him up from the inside, and it brought him down and still further down. Silvester lost his business, of course. He lost everything. He was prone to total misunderstandings and he could do nothing right. We went down and down till he had become one of the vile untouchables.

Conchita Montez had once been legendized as a stunningly beautiful woman of the latin persuasion. It had been believed that she had great charm and elegance and intelligence and presence. Her way with the English language had seemed enchanting, with all those delightful slurrings and mispronunciations. Her eyes and her wit twinkled, and she was one of the persons who brightened her era. That was the legend. But beautiful legends are not always self-sustaining: there is a fragility about

even the best of them. And those were the times of fragile personalities.

It isn't known quite where Conchita went wrong. She had given so much enjoyment to everyone! But it was said that she was very particular about whom she gave more special enjoyment to. She apparently didn't know who was running the world in those years. Her rejections of some of the high lords were resented.

"The old way would be to throw acid in your face and so wreck your beauty," one of those lords told her. "We are more subtle and more thorough now. We throw the acid behind your face and it wrecks your whole person. Then your face will crumble of itself."

So those Person-Projectors did a job on Conchita and she became repulsive at once. Became repulsive? She had always been repulsive, of course. Hers was a repulsive nature.

What did we ever see in her? Old posters of her had shown her as absolutely beautiful. That was when those old posters were new. Well, why didn't those same posters still show her as beautiful? Because she was repulsive and always had been. And now they showed her as repulsive.

But no poster could show her as repulsive as she really was. A poster could not show the mush-mouthed offensiveness of her speech or the screaming tediousness of her person.

So she became a hooded and swathed untouchable, ringing her cracked bell when she had to be out-of-doors, avoiding and avoided by all decent people.

#### 4.

*My wife is like a doll with a crooked back  
And a voice like a broken fiddle.  
I love her like a potato sack  
With a rope around her middle.*

*-Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.*

Crispin and Sharon Babcock went that evening into what was probably the most beautiful sly hall in the world. If it had not been so before, their entering almost guaranteed that it would be so now. The sly halls were the last refuge where obnoxious people could gather to enjoy (it was as if the word 'en-joy' had been minted fresh just for the sly halls), to enjoy the rousing old pleasures and beauties. The enjoyments and the beauties were very subjective and selective, and they were awfully tenuous. But they were the only enjoyments and beauties that these people could bring about. These places ought be kept enjoyable as long as their people held together on their clear courses.

"The thing will work as long as we are all faithful to each other," Crispin Babcock said. "Oh Lord of the Sick Scorpions, please don't say that again, and again, and again!" Sharon Babcock moaned to herself. (Crispin's statement was one that he made a thousand times a day.)

All the members of the sly halls were outcasts of the untouchable class. They ate and drank in the sly halls. They played music and chukki there. They had shows, they had arts, they had books and all graphics. There were body sports and mind sports. There was song and dance, conversation and cookery and casuistry.

In every sly hall were the one and two room mansions for the couples and for the families (though there were few children; most of the children of the outcasts had been destroyed. There were the single rooms for the sitiglings. There were the blessed rituals that are at the heart of every sly hall; and there was the intense civilization that is the seal of all the sly people.

Some of the folks in the halls were neither masked nor veiled. Some did not even wear the great cloak, the wrongly caned 'invisibility cloak'. They were guised of themselves, they said: they had no need to be disguised. But that was only fancy talk. Most of them were as masked and

swathed as it was possible to be.

“Wintergreen was knocked off today,” Judge Baluster said. “That’s nine of the sly halls knocked off in four days and nights. Somehow the companies are shattered and the people flee out of the halls. So they are arrested for being persistently in public places, and some of them are executed for it. They can’t live anywhere except in the halls. Who would rent or sell rooms or houses to the outcasts? But the people get more fun out of the outcasts when they are driven into the open. There was complaint before that they hardly got to enjoy those of us who made such shelters for ourselves. Some new technique is being used to break up the companies and make the outcast people flee the halls.”

Baluster was keeping his hands busy arranging the ritual places in the sly hall: the 3.05 meter long poles, the pairs of mittens, the desperation-philosophy texts, the tin cans and the wires to run between them, the electric helmets with their euphoric vibes, the piles of good-will mottos.

“What is the new technique, Roger?” Silvester Sureman asked. “Dammit, Roger, can’t you do something about your appearance?”

“I’m sitting out of your line of vision, Silvester,” Roger Baluster said, “and I’m completely swathed, so that not one particle of me can be seen in any case. What do you mean by my appearance?”

“It’s nauseating, you know, and your voice is worse. Well, what is the technique that they’re using on its now?”

“I don’t know, Silvester, but they’re attacking out of a new dimension. I thought that they couldn’t hit us with anything else, but they seem to be doing it. We thought we could set up asylums here and there, the sly halls, and make them into worlds of our own. We thought that, in our own circles, we could gradually become less repulsive, be ourselves and to each other, and so regain a measure of self-respect. And we have made progress, very slow progress.”

“Oh yes. In a thousand years our progress might be seen clearly, to one with sharp eyes,” Silvester Sureman said dismally.

“At least we still have each other, Sharon,” Crispin Babcock wheezed, and he pressed Sharon’s hand. “Aw, ugh, ugh, ugh,” Sharon said with a complete lack of enthusiasm. “Don’t, Crispin. It’s like being touched by a reptile.”

But it was a pleasantly contrived world that they had made for themselves in the sly hall. The great skylights let the sunlight in during

the daylight hours; and there was profuse greenery and striking garden arrangements. Otters played in the stream and in the fountain. The bright weavers were everywhere. Salamanders ran like quicksilver and fire over everything. There were cascades of ivy. Eagles perched on the entrance posts, and there was a certain architecture of pride in the big building and in its people.

“We are all celebrities now, you know,” Conchita Montez mumbled. “People everywhere in the world know us and know who we are. It isn’t much, but it is something. We are valid characters, even if we are only characters for the popular hate-culture.”

“The ultimate pornography, hatred,” Crispin said piously.

“Yes, that’s so,” Silvester agreed. “The Projection Lords are not really snperior to ourselves any more than an axe murderer is superior to his victims. But there’s no denying that they have the advantage over us, and it may be the ultimate advantage. You do know why they keep a few of us alive?”

“Oh, it’s necessary for the balance of their system that the people and themselves have something to hate intensely,” Baluster said. “And it’s quite true that hating is fine, that it’s a deep and furious pleasure. But we ourselves can’t hate the Projector Lords, and we can’t hate the populace whom they control. They smiply are not programmed to be hated, and the Lords have the control of the programming. But we can hate ourselves and others of the outcasts; we can and we do. It’s the last pleasure left to us. That’s what is behind our scapegoat trick that we have agreed upon. By it, some of us will be saved when our company is stricken. We don’t yet know who our scapegoat will be. Whomever the lightning of our hatred strikes first, that will be the one.”

“They want us out in the open where they can have cleaner shots at hating us,” Conchita said. “Oh well, I guess I want us out in the open too. It’s stifling in here.”

“A thre-point-oh-five meter pole, two pairs of mittens, a couple of tin cans, and a length of wire,” said Crispin Babcock. “Who would believe that they would be last-chance things? I don’t know how we will use them yet (it will be given to us in that hour how to use them), but this is the list that comes to my mind for Sharon and myself. And all these things are here among the ritual objects of our own sly hall.”

“It’s remarkable how little hardware they have to use in Person-

Projecting,” Silvester Sureman said. “It’s just a combination of coded frequencies to express a displeasure, to contain a person-identification, and to call for an echo, all formed into a wave transmission and set to travel around the world on a common carrier wave. And there is filtering as needed and amplification as needed. And behold! a person is smeared to destruction, forever and to all the world. It’s the Dynasty of Hatred that now obtains in the world. “

“And also there is very little software that they have to use in Person-Projecting. A repertoire of hatreds is maintained; it is added to from the residues of broken persons, and it is dispensed freely and rather imaginatively. A person-smear will be manifest to almost every sense including the unorganed intuitive senses. Except smell. Smell is transmitted only by actual physical particles from the smelled object reaching one.”

“But could not smell-reminders be triggered electronically? Could not smell be transmitted in some coded fashion? Nothing comes into our minds without a reason, and the sense of strong and murderous smell has just come into my mind. People, is smell the new technique? Is it the attack out of the new dimension? I feel that it is, and I feel that it’s upon us now.”

Wisteria Manford burst into the sly hall. Wisteria had long since fallen into the outcast condition. She had run out of money for her personality maintenance. It is very dangerous to run out of money. And it takes a lot of money to maintain a borderline personality.

“Garden City has fallen!” Wisteria cried. “Exaltation Heights has fallen! Beggar on Horseback has fallen! Snug Harbor and Bright Shores and Citadel and Gold Beach and Pleasant Gardens and Tomorrow Land have all been shattered. All the sly halls are being emptied by this new attack, and we’re next.

It’s a stink that they use to split up the people, a killing stink. And it’s coming to us right now.”

Indeed, the first heavy wave of stench had come into the sly hall with

Wisteria. They shrank away from her. Through the holes in the walls they shrank away from her. The stench shattered the Company, and it changed the sly hall itself completely.

In the light of, in the odor of the new and overpowering stench, the sly hall changed. It does not matter whether the change was subjective or

objective. In the new order, there is no difference between the two conditions. The great sky-lights of the hall — what great sky light? — were sky holes, roof holes. The roof itself was fallen-in and gappy; that's why there was always sunlight during the daylight hours. The famous greenery of the hall was not so very green. The plants growing there were stinkweed and sick fungus. The otters playing in the stream and fountain were seen to be slashing rats skulking out of the stagnant water. The bright weavers were uncommon spiders of unusual size and malevolence. The salamanders were snakes. The quicksilver-and-fire was a slimy decay lit up by methane-rot. The ivy was poison ivy. The perched eagles were vultures and buzzards. And the only pride to be found in the hall was the stubborn pride of carrion flesh. The people wanted out of that hateful hall at once. How had they ever gathered in such an offensive place?

With the second heavy wave of stench the people did all burst out of the hall. It was necessary that they get away from their rotten refuge, but it was even more necessary that they get away from each other and the foulness of their former company. The supreme necessity was that they should get away from their stinking selves, but how was that to be accomplished? But Crispin Babcock, in spite of the furious urge to be gone, did pick up certain ritual objects that had already been in his mind.

With the third heavy wave of killing stench, the scape-goats were chosen blindly by the scattering company. And those scapes whom the lightning of hatred struck first and most violently were —

#### 4.

*We are the stenchy actors cast  
In the reeky, melliferous role.  
We are the folks that nobody da'st  
To touch with a ten-foot pole.*

— *Rotten Peoples' Rollicks.*

Those scape-goats whom the lightning of the hatred struck first and hardest were Crispin and Sharon Babcock. All the people broke away from Crispin and Sharon in revulsion, and they looked at each other in sniggering horror.

“At least we have each other,” Crispin said sickly.

“If you say that once more I'll scream my head off!” Sharon wailed shrilly.

“Small loss if you did. Gah! What a head!” Crispin shouted.

And yet they were still in accord a little bit. People truly in love will always be a little bit in accord. There was something valiant about their response. Both of them realized at the same time what to do with the ritual objects. Each one of them put one mitten on his end of the 3.05 meter pole and the other mitten on his hand to hold it. They rigged the length of wire between the two tin cans and made a kids' telephone. Crispin and Sharon had been children together and had talked on tin-can phones befoer. They still cared for each other slightly, but on how they both did stink! Was there any possible way that the 3.05 meter pole would be long enough? They should have put 3.05 kilometers between each other.

But when they talked to each other on the tin-can telephones much of the ugly, sound-clashing horror had gone out of their voices. Here was a sound filter that nobody knew about except themselves. Their words had a rusty sound, but they were not otherwise offensive. Here was something that all the Person-Projector companies had overlooked. If they had known about it they would have done a job on tin cans also, to make any sound coming through them repellent.

The two Babcocks headed into a stiff wind that blew the smell off them pretty well. Why, this would be almost bearable, this life together-



apart! Only ten feet apart, and they could breathe. They were hooded and shrouded, of course, and could never actually see each other again, but remembered appearances came to them that were a little less horrible than they had been used to in more recent unless times. Each pressed his end of the pole with mittened hand, and it was almost like holding hands again.

They even became a little bit jocular in their rusty-voiced banter back and forth.

“Ship to shore, ship to shore!”

“My wife is a rot-headed, smelly bore,” Crispin bawled into his tin can, and they both laughed. ‘Ship to shore’ and ‘shore to ship’ had been their tin-can telephone code when they were children.

“Shore to ship! Shore to ship!”

“With his wobbly brains and his wobbly lip,” Sharon laughed a rusty jeer.

Oh, somehow things would still be tolerable between them, despite the fact that they were the smelliest and lowest outcasts in the land! Even the birds veered away from them in the air. But if they kept a firm grip on the pole they could keep from flying apart. If the strong breeze held forever (they needed that to keep their smell from building to critical intensity), if they didn’t begin to think about the situation again, if there was not another assault to drive them finally into sick insanity, if —

There was another assault, the fourth heavy wave of killing stench and hatred. And both fell to the ground. This would be the death of them, and the joy of many millions of people who had picked up the tang and rhythm of the drama and disintegration.

But the last problem of Crispin and Sharon was holding off that ultimate hatred. Could they delay the mortal hatred for each other until merciful death should have taken them?

No, of course they couldn’t delay it. It was the mortal hatred that killed them. The Hand with One Hundred Fingers will not be cheated by any last minute tricks.

## OH TELL ME, WILL IT FREEZE TONIGHT

*Delicious bird, and tree unkind,  
And swallowed storms and matters  
murky,  
However find the truth behind?  
You find it out by talking turkey.  
—Winding Stair Woomagoos*

“We are now in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle of weather phenomena,” Hector Voiles said with that breeze-showing voice of his. “This is the area where storms and inversions and highs disappear and are never seen again.”

“There is one characteristic of triangles in this area,” said Lloyd Rightfoot. “They are unstable. The triangle will collapse right along here, within a mile either way. And the three elements of the triangle will become four.”

“Oh, is the fourth man following us?” Andrew Widepicture asked. “I hadn’t felt his presence today. I do now. He isn’t following us though. He’s up ahead.”

Really there wasn’t anything preternatural about the game warden Will Hightrack joining any group of hunters coming up from the Jack’s Fork into the foothills. And groups of hunters are almost always groups of three. This group was made up of Hector Voiles, a weatherman, Lloyd Rightfoot, a naturalist, and Andrew Widepicture, a cosmologist. They all liked to foot-scuff around in the Winding Stair Mountains, and they often carried firearms as an excuse.

“I hadn’t paid too much attention to the Bermuda Triangle aspects myself, Hector said. “I was too close to the clouds to see the weather. But I’ve reported an awful lot of the disappearances without seeing the connection, and other weathermen have made the connections. The weather is always stormier and more sudden on the other side of the fence, you know? And the weathermen have their own other-side-of-the-fence publication, Cloud Nine D, and it handles weather wrinkles from all around, all the odd facts that don’t fit in. Some of the stuff is pretty curious. Several of the men want me to do a piece on the Bermuda Triangle aspect of this corner of the Winding Stair Mountains.”

The Winding Stair Mountains are pleasantly junky little mountains, very pretty, but small-scale and in no way unique.

“Be a little more clear, Hector,” Lloyd Eightfoot said. “What are you trying to imply with your talk of ‘Bermuda Triangle’ weather phenomenon here?”

“Oh, gathering storms do disappear here. They disappear as if something gobbled them right up, or as if they were sucked into big holes in the air or in the mountain. There can be a pretty active tumbling storm moving right along and spreading and gaining strength. And then (such a thing shouldn’t happen, of course) that storm will cease to spread. It will narrow, rather. It will narrow further, and it will grow in intensity. Then it will become quite concentrated and powerful so that it seems certain to break into thunderburst or cyclone. And then, at its most intense and threatening, it will absolutely disappear; and there will not be a trace or a track of it left.”

“Where and when do these things happen?” Andrew Widepicture asked. He was sceptical but interested. Cosmologists are interested in almost everything.

“They happen right around here,” Hector told them, “always within a radius of one or two miles of here. And it happens about once a year, right about now, mostly in the month of March, but sometimes in April. Not every year, but almost every year. Really, storms and incipient storms do disappear here without a trace, and their disappearances violate the law of conservation of meteorological energy.

“That I’ll not believe,” Lloyd Rightfoot said. “When anything is reported as disappearing without a trace, then the report is false. Have you been putting out false reports, Hector? Or is it that you cannot recognize traces? Nothing disappears. But some things transmute so strangely that they seem to have disappeared. Don’t your active and tumbling storms transmute into something else when they are gobbled up, Hector?”

“Yes, they do. They transmute into cold, into very sudden and quite severe cold. This cold is always narrowly localized, of course. And, for that matter, so are the storms.”

“Like the quick-freeze spell we ran into last year, Hector?” Andrew Widepicture asked. “That was just about this time of year.”

“It was about a week later,” Hector said, “the latest freeze I remember

here. I won't say that it was the latest freeze ever recorded here, because it wasn't recorded. I was talked out of recording it. It was so improbable that the temperature in this small area should be forty degrees lower than that of nearby areas that it just wasn't a thing that should have been recorded. And the report would have been tainted by the fact that only myself and two ana-cronies (yourselves) encountered it. There would be people who said that we had drunk off too many cans of Old Frosty during our day's hunt."

"How have other weathermen come onto the storm-disappearances?" Rightfoot asked.

"Oh, it's been happening for several generations, all the generations that records go back here. And it's almost always observed by several fellows. And weathermen are natural browsers of old records, besides having long noses and long ears and long instruments."

"Your swallowed storms don't seem to blow me down," Rightfoot said. "What I would like to find out is about a most peculiar tree in this region. It's a consistent legend, and a consistent legend has to have a pragmatic kernel to it. They say that this tree produces — No, they say that it almost produces a bloody-awful-red fruit. But, happily, something always kills that fruit. The tree, I have heard the bark-brained say, is of no known species. Oh wood lice plague them all! A tree has to be of a known species, or we will name it and make it known. I want to get a look at that tree with the flesh-red fruit that never develops."

"What I would like to find about is a most peculiar cock-crow in this region," Andrew Widepicture said. "It also is a consistent legend, so I cannot throw it away completely. But a cattle-killing crow takes a lot of believing."

"Crows have killed small calves," Rightfoot the naturalist said, "but these are mostly misborn calves that are dying anyhow. Crows have been known to eat the eyes and even the tongues of such calves."

"According to the bird-brained, this most peculiar crow carries full-grown cattle off in its claws and beak," Widepicture said, "and it will eat a grown bull at a single roosting."

"Holy crow!" Hector Voiles cried. "Your legends have gobbled up my legend."

"What are you fellows hunting?" the game warden Will Hightrack demanded as he appeared in their rocky path and collapsed their triangle

by becoming the fourth man. "You cannot in good conscience be out gunning at all. There is nothing at all in season right now."

"Storm-Cock is in season, Hightrack," Widepicture said. "Storm-Cock has a very short season, less than a month, and it hasn't been hunted near enough. Storm-Cock and Freeze-Bird! You show us a regulation that we can't hunt them."

"Ah, I may be hunting some long-tongued town-trotters this very day," said game warden Hightrack. "But it's said about the birds that you mention that they never saw the inside of an egg."

"Holy crow is in season," Widepicture said, "but the holy crow season is appointed backwards. It's that crow that does the hunting."

It was a nice sunny day there. Sometimes the breeze showed a slight edge to it, but the hills and the trees and the brush exuded warmth, as did the air between the breezes.

"If town gentlemen could shoot, I wouldn't object to one of them shooting a very big wild tom turkey," game warden High track said. "But I'd object to any of them getting a closer shot than the present eighty yards. I'd object to more than one of them shooting. And I'd object to myself pointing the shot out to any of those gentlemen. But town gentlemen cannot see and they cannot shoot, so that feast will not come to the board."

"I can see. I can shoot," Andrew Widepicture said. He raised his rifle towards a blurred bit of mountain brush in the middle distance. He held his point for a measured five seconds. Then he squeezed off his shoot.

"Good," said Hightrack. "That will make a good meal for the six of us."

"You say 'for the six of us,' Will Hightrack," Widepicture remarked then. "Will the dead turkey arrange for its own transportation? Yes, I see that it will."

A bit later, two men brought the shot turkey. These men were James South-Forty and Thomas Wrong-Rain. They were scrub-cattle ranchers and rock-acre farmers of the region. They were large, burly, brown men. They were Jack's Fork Choctaw Indian men.

Yeah, it would take about an hour and a half to get that turkey ready. There aren't any experts at cooking a turkey or anything else in the open. Not white men, not Indians, not hunters, not wranglers, none of them are any good at it. There's a lot of large-mouth fakery about such cooking. Half the meat would be ruined, and half of it would be only half bad when

finally prepared; but it was a big turkey, and the not-bad half would feed six men.

It was pleasant noon or early afternoon. There was new moss grass there on the slopes, and old buffalo grass. There were rotten boles of hackberry and there were joints of cedar wood that didn't care whether they were burned or not. There was last season's brush, and it all made a strong and smoky fire. If smoke would roast a turkey, that big one would be roasted quickly. But it would be a while yet.

So they talked turkey while the turkey cooked unevenly in pits and in rock ovens and on spits, and half of it would be ruined. "Turkey talk" doesn't mean exactly what is supposed of it. It isn't plain talk. Sometimes that gobble-gabble gets fancy.

"It occurs to me that the three gentlemen don't know very much about what they have been talking about," Thomas Wrong-Rain said. "It occurs to me that even the weatherman gentlemen doesn't know why we have to have another freeze this year."

"No, we will not have another freeze this season," weatherman Hector Voiles said. "The rattlesnakes have been coming out of their holes for a week. The swallows and swifts and cardinals have all arrived. The oak leaves are as big as squirrels' ears, so it is time to plant corn. We had a light freeze on the first (day) of spring, and it will have been the last one. We have had later freezes, two I believe, but all the signs say that we will not have another freeze this season."

"Then all the signs are mush-mouthed frauds," Thomas Wrong-Rain maintained. "I did not say that we would have another freeze: say it that way and maybe we won't. I said that we have to have another freeze. The alternative to that is pretty shaggy. If it comes right down to the raw end and we haven't had that freeze, then we will have to make it freeze!"

"What will you do, Wrong-Rain, have a rain dance or a frost dance to make it freeze?" Will Hightrack the game warden jeered.

"No, no, no!" Wrong-Rain rejected that. "You're talking about Cherokees or some of the other brain-damaged Indians. Rain dances and frost dances are kid stuff. We will just get wrought up and make it freeze. I think it's down to the raw end already. I don't think the last freeze killed it. The tree's getting smarter. I have heard that the tree was already in bloom. If the last frost didn't kill it, then we will have to have another frost. It will be pretty direful if that tree is allowed to fruit."

“Wrong-Rain, I don’t believe that even you can pull off a direful tale today,” Widepicture joshed, “not with the sun shining in the little Winding Stair Mountains, and a mocking bird mocking. And that edge on the breeze, it isn’t much of an edge.”

“Yeah, the sun does spoil it,” Wrong-Rain admitted. “Never mind, the sun will cloud for the story if the story’s true. Well, the tree is less than a hundred feet from here. All of you have seen this tree: I have shown it to all of you. But after persons have seen this tree, sometimes a breeze will blow. Then a fine red powder or bloom-dust will drift down on the people. This makes them forget all about the tree. Normally it’s good that the people should forget. This saves them from worry and stomach-rot and irregularity and anxiety. But some of us have to remember about the tree. If it ever comes to full fruit, it will send a shadow like a blight over the whole land. This shadow will kill cattle, and it will kill people.”

Andrew Widepicture laughed. Then his laugh crumbled a bit at its leading edge. The sun clouded, and it had clouded phenomenally fast. That meant that Wrong-Rain’s story was true, except that he really wasn’t telling a story. The mockingbird had left off its melody and was squalling and mewling fearfully like a catbird. And the edge of the breeze had reasserted itself.

“How does the fruit, or the shadow of the fruit, kill people?” Widepicture asked. “By disease? By disaster? By ill luck?”

“I don’t know,” Wrong-Rain admitted. “It hasn’t done it for two hundred years. But that’s just because the tree has had its fruit frost-killed every year. I tell you, though, that the tree’s getting smarter. It’s got the weather tricked this year, unless we use tricks of our own. And our own tricks are about worn out.”

“And that’s the end of your story?” Rightfoot asked.

“Yes. I wish it were the end of the tree and its fruit, too. That’s the end of my story. The sun can come out again.”

The sun came out again. And everything was again casual and unimpressive in the Winding Stair Mountains. The Winding Stairs were toy mountains. They were much less impressive even than the Potato Hills in an adjoining region. There was not any way that they could be taken seriously for long. There was no way that they could maintain a sinister aspect for more than brief minutes. These mountains were too lightminded. They were too little. So thought they all of them.

“Hey, you know why the Winding Stair Mountains are so little?” James South-Forty asked them, coming in on their thoughts rather than on any words of theirs, in the way that the Jack’s Fork Choctaws have. “They’re so little because they’re the biggest mountains that the bird could carry here, and here is where he wanted them. Even a big bird has his load limit.”

“Are we now in consideration of the second plague of the Winding Stair Mountains?” Andrew Widepicture asked with an asymmetric grin.

“I think so,” said James South-Forty. “Sometimes you lose me with that T-Town talk. Yeah, I’m talking about the Storm-Cock, the big bird. I don’t know much about that tree that Tom Wrong-Rain talks about. I don’t know how a shadow of a tree can kill cattle or people, but I know how Storm-Cock kills them. He eats them alive and he eats them dead. That’s how he kills them. He’s one big bird.”

“How big is he, South-Forty?” Hector Voiles asked. James South-Forty extended his arms. South-Forty was about six feet four inches tall, and from extended fingertip to fingertip he was about the same.

“About that big,” he said.

“We might as well go look at the tree while South-Forty talks,” Wrong-Rain said listlessly, and then they were already beside that tree. It was no more than a hundred feet from the turkey fire. A little breeze blew as they first stood by the tree, and a little bit of bloom-dust drifted down on them so that they were unable to notice much about the tree. It unhinged their limbs and their minds, it gave them stomach-rot-and-apprehensions, it set them to shaking in every joint and tendon, but they didn’t really notice much about it. The fruit was huge and horrible and livid red. It had a rank murder-smell to it, and it would kill you. That fruit had been frosted, and it had rotted. But it wasn’t certain that it was quite dead. A small breeze blew again, and who notices details about a tree when there is that sort of bloom-dust in the air?

“South-Forty, you indicated that Storm-Cock was between six feet and six and a half feet big,” Hector taunted. “Well, that’s big for a bird, but it’s not big enough for a bird that can carry off full-grown cattle. How many cattle can he carry off at a time, South-Forty?”

“Three,” said James South-Forty. “One in his beak, and one in each claw. And sometimes he carries another one in — aw naw, I’d better not tell that. It’d be a lie.”



“Ah, but look, James,” Widepicture reasoned. “The bird wouldn’t be big enough to do it. A bird couldn’t carry three or four head of grown cattle even if it had a six and a half foot wingspan.

“Wingspan!” South-Forty gasped. “Who said wingspan? I showed you how big Storm-Cock was between the eyes. That’s the way you always measure a storm-cock, between the eyes.”

They all laughed then. “Seems like I whomped you all between the eyes with that joke,” South-Forty gloated. “You walked right into that one.”

Another small breeze blew, and a critical amount of bloom-dust drifted down from the tree onto the six men. It was a sufficient quantity of dust so that none of them would remember seeing a tree with livid red undead fruit with a rank murder-smell. They wouldn’t remember that tree at all, except Wrong-Rain.

They went to eat the turkey meat. Some of the pieces were burnt on the outside and raw-red on the inside. Some of them were burnt all the way through. And a few of the chunks were pretty good.

“When are you going to give me some good weather tips again, Wrong-Rain?” Hector Voiles asked as they chewed the stringy meat. “I have consistently been the worst weatherman in town for quite a while. They’re going to give me the boot if I don’t come up with something sharp.”

“You’ll be like that weatherman who had to move to California because the weather here didn’t agree with him,” Lloyd Rightfoot said.

“Maybe I’ll phone you tonight,” Wrong-Rain said. “I may give you a tip on the weather that no one else would ever guess. Will you use it if I give you a real slanted tip?”

“Yes, I will,” Hector promised. “I’ll use it whatever you give me.

They ate the rest of the turkey, except for a few pieces which were an extreme case.

“Do you know what’s the spookiest phrase that can be spoken?” Wrong-Rain asked them suddenly. “It’s ‘The Bird in the Tree’. that’s the spookiest of all. Think about it.” But they couldn’t think whether he meant the bird they had just eaten or some other bird. They shot three or four rabbits for the hunting pouch. Then Voiles and Rightfoot and Widepicture scuffed down the little mountain and to their car.

They left the livid and hating tree behind them; but they couldn’t give

a name to the menace because its bloom-dust had destroyed their memory of it.

They got in the car and drove back to T-Town.

Oh wayward storms, destroyed, demurred!  
Oh tree to gobble and defeat them!  
All caution lest the murder-bird  
Should bite folks clear in two and eat them!  
Winding Stair Woomagoos

Thomas Wrong-Rain phoned Hector Voiles at his studio at nine o'clock that night. "A hard freeze tonight in the Winding Stairs, Mr. Voiles," Wrong-Rain said. "We have to have that. The fruit is alive. It would break out before dawn tomorrow. Remember that 'The Bird in the Tree' is the spookiest phrase of them all. It has got to freeze hard tonight. Have you any storms that we could use to fuel the freeze?"

"A warm spell is blowing in, Wrong-Rain. It's strong and twisty, and it's probably dangerous. It could be a real nine-county thunderburst, or it could spin into half a dozen cyclones. It would be a pretty strong storm to swallow, even in the Bermuda Triangle."

"It should be strong enough to make a heavy freeze. Remember the bird that never saw the inside of an egg! That fruit has got to be killed! Announce that it will freeze, and that will put the pressure on for it."

"Wrong-Rain, this storm is a strong-warm. It's seventy-two degrees here now, and it's nine o'clock at night. Fun's fun, but you can't make a freeze out of this one, and it's too big to swallow. How do you make the changes, anyhow? Or are you the one?"

"I'm one of the ones. When the menace appears, and we just got to have a hard freeze for the safety of the region, then I'm one of those who goes for it. I bust my mind for it, as did my father Joe Wrong-Rain before me. Dammit, Voiles, this is The Bird in the Tree! Help us to kill it. We need help. But my friends and I do have the support of a strong person named \_\_\_\_\_ am, \_\_\_\_\_ Plus tophushmasapulphattalokarchikkapokartahapatishomobilingo."

"With five t's? Got it. All right, Wrong-Rain, I'll do it. I'll put my neck in the frosty noose. I'll give them a weather report tonight that'll rupture the station. That's my own neck I feel them chopping off, but it all might

be fun.”

“Watch that fun stuff, Mr. Voiles,” Thomas Wrong-Rain begged.

“No derision, please. Derision will imperil the whole business.”

“Well, all right,” Voiles agreed dubiously, “but you’re asking a lot there. I break up sometimes.”

There were already tornado alerts out for Pushmataha, Latimer, Le Flore, and Haskell Counties. So Hector Voiles put out his own alert, to the other weathermen of the country, especially to those of the Cloud Nine D interest. Voiles told them flatly that there would be a storm disappearance in the Little Bermuda Triangle of Oklahoma tonight. He told them that history would be unmade before their very eyes on their very charts if only they paid attention. And he said that the disappearance of the storm would be marked, not by an oil slick, but by an incredible freeze.

Then he went and got half a snoot-full before he broadcast his nightly weather at ten o’clock. He gave the routine reports. He gave the information that four counties were under tornado alerts. Then he grinned a lowering grin and began a brisk gust in that breeze-a-blowing voice of his.

“Forget the tornado alerts,” Hector told his airy audience. “There won’t be ally tornados tonight. That skirmish line of storms, it will be funneled and narrowed into a single disturbance, a concentrated storm. And this storm will disappear completely when it is in its most powerful and most concentrated stage. It will disappear in the Little Bermuda Triangle and it will never be seen again. It will disappear in the Winding Stair Mountains at the border of Latimer and Le Flore Counties. It will disappear in storm-wreck and annihilation.

“Listen, people, there is a Bird in a Tree. This is a crucial bird, and it never saw the inside of an egg. This bird must be killed even before it comes to sustaining life. Otherwise, it will fly around the region, with its black shadow under it, and it will destroy land and kill cattle and people.

“There is only one thing that can destroy the Storm-Cock, the Bird in the Tree. A hard freeze can kill it, after the bird has begun to bloom but just before it has attained mobile life. It must happen right now, before morning, or the Tree-Bird will rive open tile tree and go out and destroy the land and its crops and its cattle and its people.

“Now hear my predictions, on which I am staking my reputation and

perhaps my life. There will not be thunderstorms or tornados or cyclones. The skirmish line of storms has already narrowed into a single storm front. This storm front will disappear completely within the next fifteen minutes. It will disappear into a hole in a mountain, or into a hole in the air. And the kickback of the disappearing storm will be the cold. This will be hard-freezing cold, extreme cold over the area of the four counties that have been under the alert.

“I predict that the storm will disappear completely within the next fifteen minutes; I predict that the disappearance will be followed by a quick fifty-degree drop in temperature in that same region; I predict the consequent very hard and killing freeze; and I predict that the big bird in the tree will be freeze-killed in the bloom tonight, and that it will not ravage the country and destroy the kine and the people tomorrow. These are the things that I predict, and I will stake my reputation and my life on my predictions. Who else makes such bold predictions?”

It would have been had even if Hector had left it at that. He didn't. He broke up. He began to laugh, to yowl, to chortle. He went into cascades of clattering and rotten laughter. The monitors cut him off, but he continued to laugh like a bloated buffalo.

And that is when the warm moist Gulf air hit the updraft. Turgot Cantowine busted in, and Cantowine was a mighty man at the studio.

“The only thing that can possibly save you, Voiles, is for your predictions to come true!” this Turgot swore angrily. “Man, they'd better come true! Will they?”

“I don't know,” Hector Voiles giggled. “They would have come true, I think, if I hadn't broken tip. There's something down there that can't stand derision.”

“There's something right here that can't stand it either,” Cantowine barked. “You're deriding the wrong people when you start to deride people. The phones are jumping clear out of their cradles. People are storming the studio doors within seconds of your being cut off. Let's see you make that storm disappear. Man, do you realize what you've done! You've made light of the last still-standing institution. If the weather isn't sacred, what is?”

“I don't know,” Hector giggled.

The storm didn't disappear. The thunderbursts plowed the whole northeast corner of the state with lightning outage and flash floods and

wind damage. There were six deadly tornados spawned out of the thing, and more than two dozen howling gales. The tornados killed people in the towns of Poteau and Spiro, and in the country around Jack's Fork and the Winding Stairs. That storm sure wasn't one that disappeared and was never heard from again: you'd be hearing about that storm as long as the last survivor or the last victim was still alive.

Hector Voiles followed all the reports. The studio was full of reports of the rising numbers of the dead, but Hector didn't care much about that. He had trouble getting temperature reports from the afflicted area; people seemed too busy to notice the temperature. It was eight in the morning before he was able to get a temperature reading from near the area. The temperature was sixty-nine degrees. There hadn't been a freeze.

Thomas Wrong-Rain phoned Hector Voiles about eight-thirty that morning after.

"Mr. Voiles, the worst that could happen has happened," he announced. "We just weren't able to make it freeze and we busted our brains for it. I think somebody laughed at the wrong time."

"Was there tornado damage in your immediate neighborhood?" Hector asked.

"Oh, some. My house and barns blew away, and my wife got killed; but that's not what I meant by the worst that could happen. Didn't you hear me, Voiles? It didn't freeze."

"No. I know that it didn't."

"So the last chance to kill the murderous fruit, the bird in the tree, has gone by. We just couldn't change the storm into a freeze. So that bird broke out. it split that tree with a thunder twice as loud as the storm itself. It came out of that riven tree then, and it came out of it, and it kept on coming out of it. It was as big as a herd of elephants when it came out. Then it went on a rampage.

"It ate a few cattle, but mostly it went after people. It comes on people in groups of three, and it takes and kills one of them. It's very ritual. I was over at James South-Forty's house after my own house had blown away. John Short-Summer was with us. The bird came, and we knew that it wanted just one of us. It isn't a loud bird, but it makes itself understood. We drew low-card-go to see which one of us it would be, and James South-Forty drew low card; the bird killed him and carried him off. And it's been to lots of other places and killed lots of other people. It kills

people who gaped at it when it was trapped in the bloom or in the fruit. It kills people who laughed at it or made light of it. It'll probably come and kill one of you."

"I don't think it could find us," Hector said. (All the breeze was gone out of his voice now.)

"Yeah, he can find you," Thomas Wrong-Rain said.

Hector phoned Lloyd Rightfoot and Andrew Widepicture to join him at his office at the studio. Both had been out among the elements all night, and both said that they would be right over.

"As a naturalist, my most rewarding studies are of nature at her most violent," Rightfoot said as he came in. "Hector, she was violent last night, violent for hour after hour! Somebody cut the nets and let all the thunder-fish out. The floods are the worst thing right now. Oh, was there ever a storm that exploded like that one! I once knew a horse that would stampede like that whenever someone would try to throw a bridle rope over his nose."

"Someone did try to throw a bridle rope over that storm's nose last night," Hector mumbled. "It's so easy to insult an element if you're not careful. They don't like to be laughed at."

"No, nothing in nature likes to be laughed at," Rightfoot said.

"As a cosmologist, my most illuminating moments come when I discover simple natural things going cosmic," Andrew Widepicture spoke as he came in. "There are truly cosmic elements in the peculiar wrongheadedness that has run through the night's events. It just didn't have a neat ending, not any of it. Now, if my calculations are correct, it will require the ending of either the world or myself."

"Of yourself," said Voiles. "A legend-come-to-life always eats flesh, but it will not eat all the flesh. I hope it will be satisfied with yours."

"The legend is a badly-done one, Voiles," Widepicture remarked. "It has too many moving parts. Storm-Cock and Tree-Freezer, that's enough elements there. And Tree-Freezer is complicated by the long-named demiurge who also serves as Tree-Freezer. Is the demiurge only an aspect of Wrong-Rain, or is he an independent element? And Storm-Swallower is much too much. He belongs to another legend entirely, but he was instrumental in this one. And the bird grows bigger and bigger, and less possible. I'm convinced that he's strutted with wooden bones, as he should be, coming out of a tree. He isn't a bird of the ornithos sort at all, and

he's aerodynamically unsound."

"And I'm not sure that he'll stand the test of daylight," Lloyd Rightfoot hazarded hopefully. "Some of the most incredible prodigies have very short existence spans. And at the end of their span they do not so much die as become unshaped and unrecognized. He may not have time for us before he returns to an unremembering form."

"He'll have time enough for us," Hector said. "He believes that we laughed at him when we saw him still in the bud, or anyway that we didn't pay him enough respect." Hector took a pack of cards out of a drawer and put it on his desk.

"If you spooked the bard-freeze, Voiles, then the bird owes its life to you," Widepicture said. "But don't expect gratitude. Ah, reality is very hard to define. I also doubt that the uncreature will pass the daylight test.

"We'll cut the cards for low-man-dead when he gets here," Hector said. "And the daylight test is no test at all of reality. Many very real things disappear before morning."

"This is more than a mere daylight test," Rightfoot proposed. "This is a time test. This is the eighth decade of the twentieth century of the uncommon era, and tenuous reality cannot enter here. There is a place test. This is the ninth floor of the Television Plaza Building, and reality must be more than merely contingent to exist here. There is a context test. This is beautiful downtown T-Town in broad daylight on a spring day. The blooms along the Main Mall are blooming, and the sap-sucker butterflies are fluttering around them. Automobiles are crumbling each others' fenders in the middle distance, and all the girls walking on the sidewalks are pretty. The very walls here are made out of glass and sunlight, and a too-dark reality becomes no reality at all."

A too-dark bird took out the entire outer glass-and-sunlight wall of the room and crammed the space with head and pinion top.

"So much for this particular reality," said Widepicture. "It brings its own context.

"James South-Forty was correct, Rightfoot said nervously. "The bird is about six and a half feet between the eyes."

"The bird killed South-Forty several hours ago," Hector said. "Well, the rules are (how do I know what they are?) that he takes only one of us. We cut cards low-man-dead for it." Hector cut to a red six-card, while the Storm-Cock watched with hard hatred in his big eyes. "Oh, that's awful

low,” Hector moaned.

Lloyd Rightfoot cut to a red four-card. The bird seemed to dismiss Hector then, and keep its baleful eyes on Rightfoot and Widepicture.

Widepicture struck a match on the big beak of the bird, but that was for bravado.

“That proves nothing about reality,” he said unevenly. “One can strike a match on a picture of a bird, or of a beak.” His hand fluttered like a sapsucker butterfly over the cards. He cut to a black three-card, and he was low-man-dead. The bird gazed a long time at the low card to be sure.

The bird sliced a forearm off Widepicture, as for a sample, and munched it. Widepicture waved farewell to his two friends with the other arm. He was jittery and distraught.

“No, no, I don’t accept it,” he jabbered. “This isn’t reality. This is the most unreal happening I’ve ever encountered.”

The bird sliced Widepicture sheer in two, gobbled up both pieces of him, and then withdrew from the broken room with a clatter of ungainly wings like thunder run backwards.

Sunlit reality flooded back into the room. And outside, on the brilliant sky, there was a jerky black blotch, munching bobble-headedly, flying clumsily as though strutted with wood, a thing aerodynamically impossible, incredibly awkward, and categorically unreal.



## FUNNYFINGERS

*“—and Pluto, Lord of Hell, wept when Orpheus played to him that lovely phrase from Gluck — but these were iron tears.”*

*On Tears of the Great  
—H. Belloc*

“Who am I?” Oread Funny fingers asked her mother one day, “and, for that matter, what am I?”

“Why, you are our daughter,” the mother Frances Funnyfingers told her, “or have you been talking to someone?”

“Only to myself and to my uncles in the mountain.”

“Oh. Now first, dear, I want you to know that we love you very much. There was nothing casual about it. We chose you, and you are to us—”

“Oh, take it easy, mother. I know that I’m adopted. And I’m sure that you both love me very much; you tell me so often enough. But what am I really?”

“You are a little girl, Oread, a somewhat exasperating and precocious little girl.”

“But I don’t feel precocious. I feel like a rock-head. How can I be a little bit like papa and not anything like anyone else at all? What was the connection between myself and papa?”

“There wasn’t any at first, Oread, not like that. We were looking for a child since we could not have one of our own. I fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded me of Henry. And Henry fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded him of Henry. Henry was always the favorite person of both myself and Henry. That’s a joke, dear. But not entirely; my husband is so delightfully boyish and self-centered. Now run out and play.”

“No, I think I’ll run in and play.”

“Oh, but it’s so dark and dirty and smoky in there.”

“And it’s so light and unsmoky everywhere else, mama,” Oread said, and she ran inside the mountain to play.

Well, the house and the shop of Henry Funnyfingers backed onto the mountain. It was really only a low but steep foot-hill to the Osage Hills. This was on the northwest fringe of the city. The shop was the typewriter

repair shop of Henry the father of Oread. You wouldn't know that from the sign out front, though. The sign said "Daktylographs Repaired Here, Henry Funnyfingers".

The shop part of the building was half into and under the hill. Behind the shop was a dimly lit parts room that was entirely under the hill. And behind this were other parts rooms, one after the other, rockwalled and dark, rockier and darker as one went on, all deep under the hills. And these continued, on and on, as tunnel and cavern without apparent end.

In these places of total darkness, if only one knew where to reach in which pot, there was to be found every part for every sort of machine in the world; or so Henry Funnyfingers said.

Oread ran through room after room, through passage after passage iii the blackness. She drew parts from the pots and the furnaces as she ran. She put the parts together, and it barked remindfully. "What have I forgotten?" Oread asked. "Ah, Rusty, I've given you only one ear. I'm sorry." She took the other ear from the Other Ear Pot as she ran past, and she put it on him. Then she had an iron dog complete. It would run and play and bark after her in the tunnels under the mountain.

"Oh Kelmis, Of Acmon, Oh Damnae all three! Come Out of the mountain and play with me."

Oread sang that. Sometimes the three Mountain Uncles were busy (they had to make numbers and letters and pieces for the whole world) and couldn't come to play. But almost always one of them came, and Kelmis came today. Kelmis was the smoky smelly one, but Oread didn't mind that. He was full of stories, he was full of fun, he was full of the hot darkness-fire from which anything can be made. It was great fun there through all the afternoon and evening, as they are called out in the light. But then Kelmis had to go back to work.

Oread and the iron dog Rusty ran backup the passages towards the house. She took the dog apart as they went back and put each piece into its proper pot. Last of all she put its bark in the bark pot, and she came up through the shop and into the inside of the house for supper.

"Oh, Oread, however do you got so smoky and smelly?" mother Frances Funnyfingers asked her. "Why don't you play out in the sunshine like other girls do? Why don't you play with other girls and boys?"

"I made an iron boy to play with once, mama," Oread said. "You wouldn't believe how he carried on or the things he wanted to do. I had

the devil's own time taking him apart again. That's the last boy I ever make, I tell you. They're tricky."

"Yes, as I remember it, they are," Frances conceded. "Whatever do you make your stories out of, Oread?"

"Oh, I make them out of iron," Oread told her seriously. "Iron is what everything is made out of first. The pieces are all there in the pots and the furnaces. You just put them together."

"Pieces of stories, Oread?"

"Oh yes."

"Iron stories, girl?"

"Oh, yes, yes, iron stories."

"You are funny-fingers and funny-face and funny-brains," the mother told her. "I think I'll have you eat your supper off an iron ~ate with iron spoon and knife."

"Oh, may I? I'll go make them," Oread cried.

"Make me a set while you're at it," Father Henry Funnyfingers said.

"No, Oread. Sit down and eat your supper from what we have, both of you." Frances Funnyfingers loved her husband and her daughter, but sometimes they puzzled her.

We cannot honestly say that Oread grew up; we can hardly say that she grew older. She finally started to school when she was nine years old, and she looked as though she were four or five. Going to school was only for seemliness anyhow. Oread already knew everything.

She got on well. She was a peculiar little girl, but she didn't know it. She gave disconcerting answers in class, but nobody could say that they were wrong answers. What difference does it make which end you start and answer at? She was a strange, smiling little girl, and she was liked by most of her school-mates. Those who didn't like her, feared her; and why should anyone fear so small a creature as Oread Funnyfingers? They feared her because she said "Be good to me or I'll make an iron wolf to eat you up." She would have done it, and they knew she would have done it.

And she always got her homework and got it right. She had, what seemed to her mother, an unscholarly way of doing it, though. She would take her books or her printed assignments. She would walk singing through the shop, through the parts room, through the other parts rooms behind that, and down into the passages in the toes of the hills.

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three,

Make ready all pots where the answers may be.”

Oread would sing so. Then she would pick the iron answers out of the answer pots. She'd put them together by subjects. She would stamp them onto her papers, and they would mark all the answers correct in her hand-writing. So she would have the Catechism, the Composition, the questions on the Reading, the Arithmetic all perfect. Then she'd drop all the iron answers back into the answer pots where they would melt themselves down to iron slag again.

“Don't you think that's cheating?” her mother would ask her. “What if all the other children got their home-work that way?”

“They couldn't unless they were funnyfingers,” Oread said. “The hot iron answers would burn their hands clear off unless they were funnyfingers. No, it isn't cheating. It's just knowing your subject.”

“I guess so then,” mother Frances said. There were so many things she didn't understand about her husband Henry (“He's boyish, like a boy, like an iron boy,” she'd say), and about her daughter (“She's like an owl, like a little owl, a little iron owl.”) Neither Henry nor Oread liked the daylight very much, but they always faced it as bravely as they could.

One day Oread found her mother in tears, yet there was happy salt in them. “Look,” the mother Frances said. She had a valentine, an iron valentine that Henry had given her. There was an iron heart on it and an iron verse:

‘When you are dead five hundred years  
Who once were full of life, I'll  
think of you with salty tears,  
And take another wife.’

“Oh, it's nice, mama,” Oread said. “But of iron?” Frances asked.

“Oh yes, the very first rimes were made out of iron, you know.”

“And what of the five hundred years?”

“I think it's considerate that he would wait five hundred years after you die to take another wife.”

“Yes, I suppose so, Oread.” But Frances wasn't completely at ease with her family.

Henry always made a good living from his typewriter repair shop, or rather he made a good living from his parts stocks in the rooms behind. Other dealers and repairmen, not just of typewriters but of everything, came to him for parts. His prices were reasonable, and there was never a part that he didn't have. A dealer would rattle off the catalog number of something for a tractor or a hay-baler or a dishwasher. “Just a minute,”

Henry Funnyfingers would say, and he would plunge into his mysterious back rooms. He had a comical little song he would croon to himself as he went:

“Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three,  
Now this is the number, Oh make it for me!”

and in a second, with the last word of the song just out of his mouth, he'd be back with the required part still hot in his hand. He never missed. Parts of combines, parts of electric motors, parts for Fords, he could come up with all of them instantly with only a catalog number or the broken piece itself or even a vague description to go on. And he did repair typewriters quicker and better than anyone in town. He wasn't rich, he was fearful of becoming rich; but he did well, and nobody in the Funnyfinger family wanted for anything.

When they were in the sixth grade, Oread had a boy friend. He was a Syrian boy named Scum Elia. He was dark and he was handsome. He looked the veriest little bit as though he were made of iron; that was the main reason that Oread liked him. And he seemed to suspect entirely too much about the funnyfingers; she thought that was a reason that she'd better like him.

“When you grow up (Oh, Oread, will you ever grow up?) I'm going to marry you,” Selim said boldly.

“Of course I'll grow up. Doesn't everyone?” Oread said. “But you won't be able to marry me.”

“Why not, little horned owl?”

“I don't know. I just feel that we won't be grown up at the same time.”

“Hurry up then, little iron-eyes, little basilisk-eyes,” Selim said. “I will marry you.”

They got a long well. Selim was very protective of little Oread. They like each other. What is wrong with people liking each other?

When in the eighth grade, Oread made a discovery about Sister Mary Dactyl, the art teacher for all the grades. Sister Mary D seemed to be very young. “But she can't be that young,” Oread told Selim. “Some of the my thological things she draws, they're been gone a long time. She has to be old to have seen them.” “Oh, she draws them from old stories and old descriptions,” Selim said, “or she just draws them out of her imagination.” “A couple of them she didn't draw cut out of her imagination,” Oread insisted. “She had to have seen them.” That,

however, wasn't the discovery.

Sister M.D. was drawing something very rapidly one day, and she forgot that someone with very rapid eyes might be watching her hands. Oread saw, and she waited around after class.

"You are a funny fingers," she said to Sister. "All your fingers are triple-jointed like mice. They can move fast as light like mine. I bet you can pick up iron parts out of the hot pots without getting burned."

"Sure I can," said Sister M.D.

"But are you a funnyfingers all the way?" Oread asked. "Papa says that, in the old language, our name Funnyfingers meant both funny-fingers and funny-toes. Are you?"

"Sure I am," said the very young looking Sister Mary Dactyl. She took off her shoes and stockings. Sisters didn't do that very often in the classroom then. Now, of course they go everywhere barefooted and in nothing but a transparent short shift, but that wasn't so when Oread Funnyfingers was still in the eighth grade.

Yes, Sister was a funny-toes also. She had the triple-jointed fast-as-vision toes. She could do more things with her toes than other people could do with their fingers.

"Did you have a little hill or mountain when you were young, I mean when you were a girl?" Oread asked her.

"Oh, yes, yes, I have it still, an interior mountain."

"How old are you, sister who always looks so young and pretty?"

"Very old, Oread, very old."

"How old?"

"Ask me again in eight years, Oread, if you still want to know."

"In eight years? Oh, all right, I will."

High school went by, four years just like a day. Selim had made a big twisted hammered iron thing that said 'Selim Loves Oread'. He suspected something very strongly about the iron. But he wasn't a funny-fingers, so it took him three weeks instead of three seconds to make the thing. Many other things happened in those four years, but they were all happy things so there is no use mentioning them.

When they were in and almost through college (Oread still looked like a nine or ten year old, and this was maddening) they were into some very intricate courses. Selim was a veritable genius, and Oread always knew in which pots the answers might be found, so the two of them qualified for

the profound fields. It is good to have a piece of the deep raw knowledge as it births, it is good to see the future lifted out of the future pots.

“We have some to the point where we must invent a whole new system of concepts and symbols,” said the instructor of one powerful course one day. “Little girl, what are you doing in this room,” he added to Oread. “This is a college building and a college course.

‘~I know it. We’ve been through this every day for a year,” she said.

“We are as much at a cross-roads as was mankind when the concept of a cross-roads was first invented,” the instructor continued. “If that concept (excluding choice pictured graphically with simple diverging lines) had not been invented, mankind would have remained at that situation, unchoosing and merely accepting. There are dozens of cases where mankind has remained in a particular situation for thousands of years for failure to invent a particular concept. I suspect that is the situation here; we have not moved in a certain area because we have not entertained the possibility of movement in that area. A whole new concept is needed, but I cannot even conceive what that concept should be.”

“Oh, I’ll make it for you tonight,” Oread said.

“Has that little girl wandered into the class again today?” the instructor asked with new irritation. “Oh yes, I remember now, you always come up with some sort of proof that you’re an enrolled member of the class and that you’re twenty-one years old. You’re not, though. You’re just a little girl with little-girl brains.”

“Oh, I know it,” Oread said sadly, “but I’ll still make the thing for you tonight.”

“Make what thing, little girl?”

“The new concept, and the symbol set that goes with it.”

“And just what does one make a concept out of?” that man asked her with near exasperation.

“I’ll make it mostly out of iron, I think,” Oread said. “I’ll use whatever is in the pots, but I guess it will be mostly iron.”

“Oh God help us!” the man cried out.

“Such a nice expression,” Oread told him, “and somebody had told me that you were an unbeliever.”

“Actually,” said the instructor, controlling himself and talking to the rest of the class and not to Oread Funnyfingers. “Actually, these things

often appear simple in retrospect. So may this be if ever we are able to make it retro. The A.B.C.s, the Alphabet isn't very hard, is it? Yes, Mr. Levkovitch, I know all about those hard letters after C. A little humor, it is said, is a tedious thing. But the Alphabet was a hard thing when mankind stood at the foothills —" "En daktulos, at the toes of, that's what the original form of the expression was," Oread told him. "Be quiet, little girl," the instructor muttered darkly. "— when mankind stood at the foothills of the alphabetical concept and looked up at the mountain, it was hard then."

"Yes, the first alphabets were all made out of hammered iron," Oread told the world, "and they were quite hard."

"The same was the case with simple arithmetic," said the instructor, disregarding Oread with a deep sigh. "It is easy as we look back on it in its ordered simplicity. But when it was only a crying need and not yet a real concept, then it was hard, very hard."

"Sure, it was made out of iron too," Oread whispered to Selim. "Why does he get so mad when I tell him about things being made out of iron?"

"It's just a weakness of the man, Oread," Selim whispered. "We'll have to accept it."

"And so we are probably at an end," the instructor was ending his class for the day. "If we cannot come up with a new dimension, with a new symbolism, with a new thought and a new concept (having no idea at all what they should be) then we might as well end this class forever.

We might as well, as a matter of likely fact, end the world forever. And on that somber note I leave you till tomorrow, if there should be a tomorrow."

"Don't worry, Mr. Zhelezovitch," Oread said. "I'll make it for you tonight."

2.

'The name Daktuloi (Fingers) is variously explained from their number being five or ten, or because they dwelt at the foot (en daktulois) of Mount Ida. The original number seems to have been three i.e. Kelmis the smelter, Damnameneus the hammer, and Acmon the anvil. This number was afterwards increased to five, then to ten... and finally to one hundred.'

Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities

'In the forests of Phrygian Ida there lived cunning magicians called



the Dactyls. Originally there were three of them. Celmis, Damnameneus and the powerful Acmon who in the caves of the mountains was the first to practice the art of Hephaestus and who knew how to work blue iron, casting it into the burning furnace. Later their number increased. From Phrygia they went to Crete where they taught the inhabitants the use of iron and how to work metals. To them is also attributed the discovery of arithmetic and the letters of the alphabet.'

Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology

'It is also said of the Dactyls (the Finger-Folk inside the hills) that they live very long lives and retain their youthful appearance for very many years.'

Mear-Daoine — Groff Crocker

Just after closing time that evening, Oread Funnyfingers went by City Museum to see Selim. Scum Elia worked as night watchman there to help pay his way through the University. There really wasn't much to do on the job. He sat at a big administrator's desk and studied all night. Studying all night every night is how he got to be a genius. Oread had brought some sandwiches with her.

"Peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches made out of iron," Selim joked.

"No, they're not of iron," Oread said solemnly. "One would need iron teeth to eat an iron sandwich."

"Surely a funnyfingers could manage iron teeth."

"Oh, our third set comes in iron, but for me that should be many years yet."

"Oread, I want to marry you."

"Everyone calls you a cradle-robber."

"I know they do. And yet we're almost exactly the same age."

"There's so many people here," Oread said. "Terra Cotta People, Marble People, Sandstone People, Basalt People, Raffia People, Wooden People, Wax People. I will have to find out from my uncles which ones are real. Some of them aren't, you know; some of them never lived at all."

"We have one of your friends or uncles here, Oread, in wax. Over here."

"I know where. You have all three of my uncles here in wax," Oread said. "You might not recognize them from the forms of their names on the plaques, though."

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon, Oh Damnae all three, Come out of your

cases and play with me.

“I don’t think they’ll come out though, Selim, since they’re made out of wax instead of iron. Effigies should always be made out of iron.”

“What do their names mean, Oread?”

“Oh Smelter, Oh Anvil, Oh Hammer all three Come out of your cases and play with me.

“No, they won’t come out. I’d have to be a bee-brain to evoke anything out of wax.”

“Oread, I love you very much.”

“No, they won’t come out at all. I’ll have them come over here themselves some night and make iron effigies of themselves. Then you can get rid of those silly wax ones.”

“Little iron-ears, I said that I loved you very much.”

“Oh, I heard you. You won’t be alarmed when they come out some night to make the effigies? They’re kind of funny-looking.”

“So are you, Oread. No, I won’t be alarmed. Why should a Syrian be alarmed over fabulous people? We’re fabulous people ourselves. And if they’re your uncles they cannot be dangerous.”

“Sure they can. I am. You said yourself that I’d set the flaming ducks after you again. I go home now, Selim, to get my homework made, and also to make that concept-symbol system for Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor. It’s important, isn’t it?”

“I’ll go with you, Oread. Yes, it’s important to Zhelly and to the class and the course. It’s true that he might as well end the class forever if he doesn’t find it. But it isn’t true that we might as well end the world if we don’t find it. It’s not quite that important.”

“Who will watch the museum if you leave? I want very much to make this correctly and understandably for Mr. Zhelezovitch. I am a Funnyfinger, and making things for people is the whole business and being of the funnyfingers.”

“Oh, tell Kelmis to watch the place of rime. Will it take long for them and you to make the concept?”

“Oh watch it for Selim, and watch it real nice, Oh Kelmis, form rotters and robbers and mice.

“Sure, he’ll watch it for you. Even a WaxmanKelmis will be faithful in that. Oh no, they never take very long to make anything for anybody any more.” (Time had slipped by, though not much of it; Selim had a sporty

car that he drove like a flaming rocket; and it wasn't very far to the northwest side of town. They were out at the Funnyfingers' place not, and into the back, back rooms that turned into tunnels.) "They never take very long to make things anymore," Oread was continuing, "not since that time, you know, when God got a little bit testy with them on Sinai when there was a little delay. They first made the tablets out of iron entirely, and they wouldn't do. They had to make them out of slate-stone with the iron letters inset in it, and the iron had to be that alloy known as command iron. Since then they are all pretty prompt with everyone, and they follow instructions exactly. You never know who it really is who places an order.

"Kelmis has the original all-iron set. I'll get him to show them to you some time."

"Where do you get your stories, Oread?"

"I tell my mother that I make them out of iron."

"And where do you really get them?"

"I make them out of iron."

Selim talked easily with the three uncles while they wrought and hammered the white-hot parts that Oread was to assemble into a symbol concept.

"How is it that you work inside a little hill in Oklahoma?" he asked them. "Shouldn't you be in the forests or hills of Phrygian Ida? How did you come to leave the Old Country?"

"This is the Old Country, and we haven't left it," powerful Acmon said. "Everything underground anywhere is part of the Old Country. All hills and mountains of the world connect down in their roots, in their toes, and they make a single place. We are in Mount Ida, we are in Crete, we are in Oklahoma. It is all one."

They made the pieces. And Oread, Dipping the parts out of the white-hot iron as if it were water, put them together to make the thing. It was a new concept-symbol system, and it looked as if it would work.

And it looked much more as if it would work the next afternoon. Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor was almost out of his mind with it. The graduate students and the regular students (for this was one of those advanced, mixed classes) crowded about it and went wild. The implications of the new thing would tumble in their minds for weeks; the class would be a marathon affair going on and on as the wonderful new

things were put to work to uncover still more wonderful things. The stars were out when Oread and Selim left the class, and no one else would leave it at all that night. But these two had something between them, and it might take another new concept to solve it.

“Oread, give me your answer,” Selim was saying again. “I want to marry you.”

“Make a wish on a star then. On that one where I’m pointing.”

“Triple jointed funnyfingers, who can tell where you’re pointing?”

“On that male star there between the several eunuch stars.”

“Yes, I see the one you mean, Oread. I make a wish. Now, when will you answer me?”

“Within a half hour. I go to question two people first.”

Oread left there at a run. She went home. She talked to her mother.

“Mama, why is my father so boyish? Is he really just a boy?”

“Yes he is, Oread. Just a boy.”

“After some years would he be a man, really, and not just a pleasant young kid?”

“I think so, Oread, yes.”

“Then after some years you two could have children of your own? Being a funnyfingers isn’t an obstacle?”

“I’ll never know that, Oread. When he is grown up I will be long dead.”

Oread ran out of there and ran to the convent that was behind the school she used to attend. She entered and went upstairs and down a hallway. She knew where she was going. One funnyfingers can always find another one. Besides, the eight years was up. She opened the door and found Sister Mary Dactyl playing solitaire with iron cards.

“How old?” Oread asked.

“Three hundred and fifty-eight years,” said Sister M D without looking up. “Were I not vowed, I would be coming to the family age now.”

Oread ran all the way back to where Selim was still waiting in the street under the stars. She was crying, she was bawling.

“The answer is no,” she blubbered. Selim, under the stars, was as white-faced as it is possible for a Syrian to be. But he must not give up.

“Oread, I love you more than you can know,” he said. “Maybe we can make a different answer out of iron,” he proposed in desperate jest.

“This is the iron answer,” she bawled, “and the answer is no.” She ran away too fast to follow.

Deep under the hills Oread was crying. She was weeping big hot tears. They weren't, however, iron tears that she wept. That part is untrue.

The tears were actually of that aromatic flux of salt and rosin that wrought-iron workers employ in their process.

## CABRITO

The Taberna was only as big as a cracker box, but it had full wall mirrors on each end which made it look three times as large. The seven stools had (not in order of importance) the Norwegian<sup>1</sup> the Irishman, a Little Brown Man, a Big Brown Man, two lesser persons, and Anita. Anita on this evening was not being spoken to by any of the other patrons of the bar; it was as though she were not there.

The Norwegian, in the apparent world, was known as Airman Lundquist, and was stationed at the Air Base across the river. He had been a sergeant and Air Man for twenty years; and now, purged of wife and family, was happy in a border town with a twenty-four hour pass every third day. The Norwegian, in the real world, was a wild Viking with a keen sense of humor and adventure, and no other sense of any kind whatsoever.

These seven people drank slow cool drinks and talked easily, for they were all good friends.

With the mirror images, it was as though twenty-one people were seated there in three only slightly separated groups; and Airman Lundquist was prominent in each group. An odd thing (hardly worth mentioning) is that, though the images of the other six persons followed them in detail, those of Airman Lundquist did not do so exactly. There were (though none at first noticed it) three Airman Lundquist, each telling a different story and drinking a different drink. The story of one was a happening at Bougainville long ago in those happier days of the great southern war; and the story of another was of a wife in Minnesota who was separated from him, as she was damned if she'd live down here, and he was damned if he'd live up there anymore; and the third one was talking about Elena who had a date with him that night but hadn't shown up. He said he was glad she hadn't showed as he always had more fun on the nights she didn't. And one of the Airmen Lundquists was drinking a Carta Blanka, and one a Gin Fizz, and one a muddy looking Rum drink that was cousin to Cuba Libre. But except for these little things Lundquist and his two images were very similar as mirror images always are.

"We will go get some cabrito," said Lundquist, the real and not the imaged or imagined Airman, "we can get it a half block from here and it's real good. Or we can go about twelve miles out and get some that's always

burned. That sure is a rough ride out there and it'll take a couple of hours. Let's go get some cabrito."

He left with his companion, the Irishman, and it seemed as if the two images of the Airman also followed, but invisibly. And all the rest of the evening they were following, for these as you have already guesses were fetches.

"Irishman," said Lundquist, "let's get in the buggy and go get some cabrito."

"Norwegian," said the Irishman, "we could walk the half block."

"We will go farther and do worse."

The driver's name was Trevino and the horse was named Jaime. They went out past the end of the town and then they were like a boat in a sea of cactus with only a narrow moon shining on the narrow road. Jaime trotted at a terrific rate, a hundred, then five hundred, then a thousand paces a minute; and after an hour they left the road and went down a wagon road and came to a great barn-like building in the dark. There were a dozen buggies there and two dozen taxis and cars. They went in and the two fetches of the Norwegian followed them.

There is an idea that only Irishmen have fetches or doubles and then only at the hour of death. This is not so. Only Irishmen can see them, but a great many people have them and the Norwegian had two of the best.

While they waited for their cabrito they drank an old essence of cactus juice that had popped more skulls than it could remember. Rows and rows of cabritos were turned on big spits over the fiery furnace which was almost the only light in the room. And Amata came over to talk to them.

"For a peso Twill tell you a story, and if you like it I'll tell you another one for the same price. And if you like that one too (listen closely) the third one will cost you only half as much."

"Mama, tell them the one about las animas," said Paco.

"That is the second story. I can't be telling the second story first."

"Well, tell the first story first."

"All right. Did you ever wonder where all the cabritos come from? See, there are a hundred turning on the spits at once, and there are a hundred places just like this one; and all the markets in town have cabritos piled high. But you seldom see them in the pastures. You may drive ten miles and if you're lucky you may see one old nanny goat, no more. Then where do all the cabritos come from? Once the authorities became anxious and

they came out here. They asked Luis, the old Modrego, 'You butcher cabritos by the dozen and yet you don't raise goats. Where do you get them?' 'But I do raise goats. What is that yonder but a she-goat?' 'But you have only one.' 'When you have a good one that is enough.' 'That isn't possible. If she twinned every time she could have more than four a year, it would be biologically impossible. And you butcher hundreds.' 'Well, because I'm a poor man who doesn't know it's impossible I've become a rich man who sells a lot of cabrito.' So they went away baffled. But this is the real story that he didn't tell them. They aren't cabritos at all, they're dogs. A dog and a kid look just alike when they're skinned. You see all the dogs running around under the tables? Well, we feed them the bones from the cabritos. Then we butcher them and make cabritos out of them. The bones of these we again feed to the dogs so we have a never ending supply and are never at any expense for food in raising them. Isn't that a good story? Give me a peso."

An old lady came over in a fury. "Did you tell them the dog story? I have forbidden you to tell the dog story. It unsettles some of the customers and they leave without finishing their supper. Believe me, gentlemen, it is a lie. We do not serve dog meat here."

"Is the old lady your mother, Amata?"

"No, she is my grand daughter. I am enchanted so I always stay young and beautiful. But all my daughters aged and died, and then all my grand daughters except that old crone and she's about ready to go too."

"Mama, you know what grandma said she'd do to you if you told that story again."

"Oh, be quiet. She can't even hear us from here. Did you like the dog story? I will tell you another story for another peso."

The Irishman and the Norwegian listened attentively, and the two fetches of the Norwegian were entranced and crowded closer.

"Well, the first story was a lie. But this is a true story. Those aren't really cabritos, they're animas. Did you know that an anima and a cabrito look just alike when they're skinned?"

"I had thought the anima would be naturally skinless."

"Well, it is. When the soul is pulled out of the body it is just like the body only smaller. The same four limbs and all, but only the size of a cabrito, for the soul is the body in miniature. There is a place near here where there is an old volcano and there it is very shallow. There are seven



brothers named Ibarra who are devils, and they thought of a way to make money. They take the animas and break their joints so they will look more like cabritos. Then they haul them up and load them on wagons. They take them around and sell them to places like this.”

“What do they do with all they money they make?”

“They spend it on whisky and girls. And they gamble a little. Then the next night they go down again and get seven more wagon-loads of souls. Do you like that story? Give me a peso.”

They served the cabritos then, barbecued, sauced, peppered, bursting with juice.

“I hardly know whether to eat it or not,” said the Irishman, “I don’t believe I ever ate either dog or damned soul before.”

“Wait’ll she tells the next one,” said Paco. “I bet you throw up. Lots of them throw up.”

“By all means eat first,” said Amata. “It is so much easier to keep it down once you have it down. I would hate to spoil your appetite before you have eaten. But it is an unusual story.”

Lundquist, the Norwegian, decided he was eating damned soul, and he gave a small portion to the Irishman who had never tasted it before. And he in turn passed a joint of that wonderful old dog to the airman. And soon they were down to picking the bones.

“The third story as I promised will only cost you half a peso. The first two stories were lies but this is the truth. When you leave here (if you leave) notice that the ruts as you circle around to drive out are not so deep as those where you came in. This is because fewer people and vehicles leave than arrive. You will also notice a pile of old buggy wheels in the back yard and another pile of old tires. This is all that is left of many who came. The last few parties who leave every night do not leave at all. We calculate just about how much we will need for the next night. And to tell you the truth they are calculating now. If by some accident you do leave you will be the last to go. Los hombres we put in one vat, and los cabal los in another. And there we chop them up just to the size of cabritos. You can make six out of a man and thirty-one out of a horse. And this is what we serve our fortunate patrons on the next night. Wasn’t that a good story? Give me a half peso, or more if you want to.”

“Is it true?”

“The last story is always true until it is superseded.”

They brought them each a piece of bread when the cabrito was completely gone.

“Do not be a barbarian and eat it,” the Norwegian explained to the Irishman who did not understand these things, “that would be worse than drinking out of a finger bowl.” They wiped their fingers on the bread and threw it to the dogs under the table, who perhaps would be cabritos the next night.

And when they left, the old lady bowed them out. “My daughter likes to tell stories to amuse the people and to make a little money. We hope they haven’t annoyed you.”

And Amata came to them and told them not to pay any attention to her grand daughter, the old crone.

They got in the buggy and Trevino whipped up Jai me and they left. And they noticed that the ruts where they circled around to drive out were not as deep as where they came in; for always fewer people left than arrived.

They got away safely, the last ones to do so that night. But the two fetches of the Norwegian were not so lucky. They stupidly allowed themselves to be caught just before they could jump on the back of the buggy. And despite their screams they were put in a vat and chopped up to the size of cabritos. And they were barbecued and served to the fortunate patrons the next night.

## HORNS ON THEIR HEADS

*A power returned to stab and stun In evil'st  
children under sun, Primarily one.*

*They clamber out of brimstone stew And  
claim the very Devil's due, Especially two.*

*Most foul of demonology, They bring effect  
that should not be, Damned children three.*

*All with a sparkling laughing roar  
They come like thunder to the door,  
In number four.*

*Mandrake's Children  
—Hans Meneke*

The pig-weeds lifted their heads and almost shouted. Such clumps of grass as still remained shook the dust from themselves and shined as green as they could. Junk gathered itself into neater and less junky piles. The garbage cans aligned themselves and the pretended to sparkle. The afternoon Surrogate fell silent in every building and house within three hundred meters, and the World Turned no more. There was a touch of unlawful order intruded here, powerful, frightening. The Devil's kids had a hand in this. Who else could set up such a pattern of disruption?

But the Devil's kids were gone again like the wind. They struck and they fled. Lawful disorder returned. The weeds drooped once more and had no desire to shout. The grass pulled the dust over itself again and groaned. The junk reverted to junk. The garbage cans fell fully awry, and some of them burst in disgust. The Surrogate World Turned again. But none of it could ever be quite the same. After each visitation of the Devil's kids there remained minute changes in everything.

Seed of the evil phlegm,  
Powers and dreads,  
Honey on tongues of them,  
Horns on their heads.

They were a bad lot. They were manifestations that could not be. When they struck, even inanimate objects seemed to move and live. They were a dazzling and disturbing shine. Their end would be soon.

For they'd been seen this time and identified. They'd been identifies

before, one or two of them, but not all four together. They'd soon be had. They had honey on their tongues; that was disallowed: they should have hard-hash on their tongues.

The worst of the four was Annina of the Horns, a demon in the form of a nine-year-old girl. Her upswept black hair made the two horn-forms at her temples. She came clear-eyed always, with neither black nor white nor green eye-glasses: an obscenity. How could she know who she was when she didn't have the identity glasses on? But none of the four wore them. She wore shoes, and shoes could only mean the cleft foot hidden. She sang, if one might call it that, but she didn't Sing the Thing.

“Stutter and stumble, the rods and the hogs!  
Follow me, bushes, and bark like dogs!”

Annina of the Horns sang songs like that. and it was always Devil's song, in that it had effect. For the rods and the hogs (the cars and the cycles) did stutter and stumble and fail of ignition and roar whenever she came by. They stopped and died. And the second part of her verse was even more frightful. The runt bushes and stunted trees did pull up roots and follow Annina, joyfully, and with a sort of green barking as well as greening bark. This was an impossibility. It had to be a manifestation of the outlawed power. Trees and bushes cannot uproot themselves and walk or gambol. They cannot enlarge themselves and shine with new health. They cannot multiply their numbers in as many minutes. Nor can they putdown new roots in the middle of asphalt and concrete and glassified areas and concourses, and shatter them in surface and depth. It was the murderous power at work, and only the murder of the devil-girl would put an end to it.

Daniel the devil-kid was nearly as bad as Annina. He was in about ten-year-old boy form. He was close-cropped and clothed in no way to be trusted. But Daniel had power over the Lions, both the black-maned and the tawny-maned Lions. The Lions were the groups and the street gangs that had long since taken over all enforcement and control. Nobody, not on the Ride, knew how they themselves were controlled: but that devil-kid Daniel could put them under total control.

“Conk in the knockers, and hack at the knees!

Bubble-heads, bubble-heads, freeze, Friz, freeze!”

Daniel would chant such stuff, and every Friz of them would freeze completely, would become immobile, would become voiceless and

sightless (incapable in the honkers and knockers), would stand stunned and stupid. And when they had them in such state, the devil-kids would take advantage of the Frizbees. They'd switch the identity eye-glasses from one Friz to another. When the Frizzes came untranced, they'd not know who they were not what sex or thing they appertained to. It didn't really matter, of course, for they were all module or interchangeable persons. But the loss (or doubt) of identity (some of them had no loss or doubt, trusting completely whatever identity glasses they were wearing) upset some of them, made them uneasy, and there is nothing worse than an uneasy Frizzie.

Ah, and then the evil kids would lob off the thatches, peel the polls, and crop the crimes of the Frizzes, leave them hairless and hewn. Much worse, much more devilish, they'd sometimes cover the privates or the pseudo-privates of these Lions, these Frizzes, these Enforcers. And what did that do to the bravest and most meaningful slogan of them all:

"Let it all hang out!?" The Lions were completely unlied without their slogan.

Michael (Quick Mick), the smallest of the demon-kids (he had the appearance of an eight-year-old boy), had his specialty.

"Trap all the trippers, and rattle their town. Off of it! Off of it! Down, clown, down!"

He'd sing that, and every tripper in the vicinity would come off it, dismally and suddenly. Great hulking horror, but they would come off of it suddenly'. The untripped trippers were always in a sad state whenever Quick Mick had passed by. Mick had only little mousy hairs at his temple, but they stood up a little bit like horns.

And th~ fourth of the demon-kids, Zorro or Azorro, was a mean-green-deme. He could do it all. He could levitate whole buildings for a sign and a wonder. He would lift up and reshuffle the houses and pads of the people so that when they came out of them (Whenever they did bestir themselves to come out), they might find themselves in different streets or even in different towns.

"Raise all the roofs and walls, shuffle the lot!

Where are you getting folks? Where are you got?"

Zorro would sing that in his happy, foxy voice. And no town or region would ever be the same. Nobody was going to unshuffle all those moved houses and pads. Rather were the identity glasses shuffled from person to

person, and such a one was told that he had now become such another one so as to be able to live in the new town or street to which he had moved.

And Zorro would do smaller things with equal joy and agility. He'd pulverize the strings of all the swing-whines (the strum-slums, the guitars) making it impossible for the people to Sing the Thing. He'd darken the sets of the surrogates, and tie the tongues of the babble. He'd bring clouds of birds and troops of squirrels and chipmunks from somewhere. He'd erupt the pavements to give his foxes place to den. This Zorro or Azorro had his own temple-horns of sandy red hair, fox hair. He was *Vulpes Dei*, the Fox of the Devil, and he had the appearance of an eleven-year-old boy.

These were the four offenders, the children of the powers: and the powers were now outlawed, were declared to be nonexistent. The only solution to it was to make it that the devil-children should also be nonexistent.

This would be done. The four manifestations had been seen and identified: they'd been Judas'd. Now they'd be obliterated, charred to their very charcoal, and then even their charcoal vaporized.

The Monitored World had freed itself of all powers and manifestations and devils some years before. Now it had total peace, and it must never more allow itself to be troubled by aberrants. There had been, though the memory of that was almost eradicated now, certain troubles and even certain blood-letting when that old freeing was secured.

But a symbol had been seized and set in that past time. A version of it had been decided upon and that version would remain. This is the way the world operates. Events must follow out of a single selected strand, and all other events be cut off.

When God was finally and officially dead, then certain pronouncements were made about the great corpse of him. These pronouncements became the fact of the matter, and all subsequent facts were based on them.

The corpse had been, in reality, that of a sky-whale (*cetus ceruleus*, the azure-whale or the sky-whale) that had crashed to the earth from the sky, or at least had been found smashed on high ground beside a seashore after a high storm. Certain trippers said that they had seen the corpse fall

from the sky, and that they had experienced the fact that it was the body of the finally dead God.

Sound decisions were made by sound men about the great corpse. If it weren't for such sound decisions there'd be nothing firm in history at all. An examination of the great corpse showed (as it was expected that it would show, as it had been decided that it would show) that this was not only the corpse of God by the corpse of the Devil as well; it showed that the two had been one and same all the while. This was demonstrated by certain telling marks on the corpse (skeptics said that there was no telling what the telling marks might be).

For there was some opposition to the official view — for a while. Men who knew whales said that the corpse was simply the corpse of a whale (not even a particularly large whale) that had been flung onto the high beach by a storm; they said that larger whales had been flung higher on that same beach by other storms, and no great thing had been made of them. It hadn't fallen from the sky at all, they said: it wasn't the corpse of either God or the Devil.

But, against this specious view, the official view prevailed and was accepted. Facts become facts when the time is ripe for them, and the time was ripe for this. There was some trouble and some blood-spilling about it, but the Freedom and the Consensus were attained in a short while. It had all been quite a few years before this present. Only the chained philosopher still remembered all the details of it clearly.

For various reasons (linguistic, quasi-historical, vestigial collective-unconscious, etc.), it was decided that the double-named and double-natured dead monster would always be referred to as the Devil or the Demon (in that transitional period when he must be referred to at all). And any manifestations or powers or supposed powers still lingering would be called Devil's Powers or Devil's Children. The eruption of such manifestations had become more and more seldom now. The windy old corpse and all its works had about disappeared.

The Free, Monitored World had quickly become loose and fragmented. There was no great need for unity or for wide-ranging communication. Things were much the same everywhere. Old Dostoevsky had written "If God (the Devil) is nothing, everything is permitted." And, of course, everything was permitted except the manifestations, the twitchings of that old corpse. Old Chesterton had written that when man

denied God (the Devil), he would not believe in nothing, but he would believe in anything. And, of course, man did now believe in some things almost coherent; he believed in anything and everything — except that there were things surpassing belief.

If the genuine in experience had disappeared (and it was realized that it had), yet there were surrogates of every thing to take the places. Indulgences were indulged. Freedom was by fiat. Apprehension was apprehended and strong-armed into dungeon. If travel had all but disappeared, yet tripping had come into its own. If law was found incompatible with freedom, yet there were certain lawless Lions who gathered into strong Prides and imposed their patterns.

And the patterns were privileged. They must not be threatened, not even by remembered things that came in the forms of small children.

Because of such threatening, several of the larger Lions, with a Judas and the Chained Philosopher present, discussed the latest (and, it was hoped, the last) series of nuisances.

“There are four of these kids of the Devil,” one of the big Lions was saying. “You can deliver them to us, Judas? You say that when they have passed (too swift to be taken) on one of their sprees, they sometimes go to a quiet place and become very quiet and unseeing. You say they can be taken then? You’ll deliver them us then.”

“I’ll deliver them to you then,” the judas said. He also was in child form, but a little older of a child than the unholy four.

“Three of them we can burn to charcoal,” the big Lion said. “They’ll give us no problem. But the Dan won’t be burned with the rest. He’d a special problem to us Lions. I believe the intent is that we eat him up. I don’t see any problem in that either, but there is rumor of a problem. Tell us what you know about it all, and about these four, Chained Philosopher.”

The Chained Philosopher had an iron collar around his neck, and a chain from it to an iron ring set in an iron wall. Once there had been three Chained Philosophers. But two of them had (it was some years ago) lunged against the collars and chains in unphilosophical defiance and broken their own necks. Now only their iron-collared skeletons remained.

But the third of the Chained Philosophers had kept himself alive, and he was even cared for. The big Lions believed he was of possible use. Sometimes one might wish to ask questions of this one man who still



remembered outlawed things.

“As you say, three of them you burn to charcoal, or can try to,” the philosopher agreed, “and the fourth one is a special problem to Lions: and the Frizes, the Enforcers, are under the Lion Emblem. But, for all that, we are simply talking about small children, no more, no less.”

“They’re different from other children!” the Big Lion challenged the Chained Philosopher.

“Yes. Most children now are a little less. These are as children should be.”

“But what is there about the boy Dan that spooks the Lions, the Frizes, the Enforcers, ourselves?”

“Only the fact that he is a real person, not a surrogate person.”

“Why do they all wear their hair like horns growing out of their temples?”

“For fun. It’s the least strange and the least hairy of the styles. Why do you yourself affect the pig-wig?”

“The girl Annina, what does her name mean?”

“Only little Anne, or Nancy.”

“I think it means something else. And the boy Quick Mick. His name, as given, is Michael. But I have different information that the name may really be Missel. Is that significant, Chained Philosopher?”

“Not very. It’s probably old feeb-Hebe.”

“The boy Zorro, what does his name mean?”

“It could mean Fox.”

“Well, what would Azorro mean?”

“It could mean un-Fox, but it probably doesn’t. Likely it’s also feebHebe”

“Both the old spooks, who turned out to be one and the same in their corpse, were feeb-Hebe in their original stories, were they not?”

“Yes, in one of their main origins, Lion.”

“How can the old corpse still send out waves so long after it has smashed and crashed?” the Big Lion asked. “They were the same in the corpse. They are dead. True, Philosopher?”

“No, the two are in no way the same. And neither of them is dead.”

“If you know more than the rest of us do, why are you chained in an iron collar, Philosopher?” the Lion inquired shaggily. “What answer do you give to the iron fact that holds you?”

“You have me there, Lion. There is something pretty ironic about the fact of the iron.”

Another of the Lions was questioning Judas a little. The Judas was a boy about thirteen years old.

“Just what is it that the four Devil’s kids do, and how do they do it?” the conniving Lion asked.

“Oh, they do everything, everything,” the Judas said. “They just plain get larkish. I could do everything too when I was with them. But I couldn’t do the things as well as they could. That’s why I got jealous and left them. I believe that all kids and everybody could do everything once, a long time ago; and these can still do the things.”

“A long time ago? You mean before the great carcass fell down from the sky and the old Monster was declared dead for ever?”

“No. I think it was before something else that was a long time before that.”

“Now you say that the four kids, after they have been ah ‘larkish’, will go to desolate places (which you know) and will be very quiet and unseeing for a long while. They ‘adore’; I believe that is the word you use. They become like happy statues then, and they can be taken. And you’ll bring us to their place so we can take them?”

“Yes.”

“And you say you know their times. Do you know when they’ll go on a lark again?”

“I think they’ve begun already,” the Judas said. “I think they’re on a big one, and I wish I was with them, if I wasn’t jealous. Three days from right now I’ll have brought you to them. All the play will be over with then and they’ll be in transport. Then take them! Burn up three of them! Eat up the other one of them!”

“Did you ever hear of anything like that, Chained Philosopher?” the first Lion, the big Lion, asked the man who was constrained in the iron collar.

“Oh yes, Lion, it used to happen. I was even on the fringes of such a group myself in my youth. I am happy to hear that is still happens.”

Then they do go into transport, and they may be taken? And there’s no way we can fail to have them in this?”

“Sadly enough, I don’t see how you can fail in destroying them. A side-light though: they’ll be very heavy when in the ecstasy state. Such was the

well-attested case of the children at Carabandal in Spain several centuries ago. It will take eight or ten strong men to lift one child from the earth and break him out of his spell.”

“We’ll have the strong men, Chained Philosopher. We’ll remove this last threat, this final twitch of the monstrous carcasses. The hell kids will have raised their last hell.”

The Judas was right, though. The kids had already gone on another lark. The hell kids were raising plenty of hell for a while. They outdid themselves. They raised earth-swells, merry pitching for some of the people, nauseating sickness for others. They raised thunderheads that were carven masterpieces: indeed the homed heads of the four of them could be seen in the clouds by some. This ain’t a thing to put Lions and Frizzes at their ease.

The devil kids made particular rain to fall. Particular rain doesn’t fall equally on the just and the unjust. It fell overwhelmingly and drenchingly (even fatally in several cases) on such people as the devil kids did not accord with; but it dampened the acceptable people not at all. They dazzled with selective lightning: it lighted up all the worthy folks with a sort of comic glory; it left the less worthy ones invisible in their own darkness, invisible even to themselves.

The kids brought a gathering noise, a running ground-thunder with them; or was it thunder? It was a whooping clattering sound, at least. It was unpatterned, but with a difference: it was the only unpatterned sort of noise that found no wide welcome in that sour ambient. It was laughing, it was thunder-laughing, and it hadn’t been heard much for a long time.

Something else the kids dragged along with them: it can only be called the Heroin Itch. Oh, it did liven the people up!-but some to their misery and some to their delight.

The kids did all their old devil tricks, but quicker, brighter than before. They gladdened and moved the grass and the rocks. They brought trees suddenly to new leaf, and not always to their own proper leaf. They set the very earth a-crawl with happy worms. And more people fell under the devil spell of the kids than had ever done so before. All the monitors of the monitored free world were set to clanging by the kids.

“Shout! The hills jump in their hocks and their hams. Whistle! The billibongs gambol like lambs.”

There was Quick Mick with his raveled temple-horns who set the hills to hopping and the brooks to skippering. Then Azorro gave a really bristly, foxy tone to it:

“Bleed a red laughter in dying and borning!

Burst! It is day of the judgment this morning!”

The passage of children was very broad swath, and they cut their enemies down like patches of burdock. They had a wild enthusiasm on them; but what is wrong with that word? And Annina of the Horns seemed completely out her head:

“I sing a red tune for the sharks in the sea. Hark! It is really benignant of me!”

But they didn't seem completely benignant, the things that the devil's kids were doing now. In this their last sortie, they did starker things than they'd ever done before: mind-blowing things, brain-blowing things literally. In certain fetid pads, the passage of the children left great globs of blown-brain on floor and wall and ceiling. It was judgment morning for a long time. The passaging kids couldn't be taken and they couldn't be found. They left their passage trails in cloud and earth and water. It was a wilder and more general larkishness than they had ever shown before. It was an enthusiasm double enthused, but what was a little but wrong with that word? Enthuse means the un-God, the in-Theos; not the in-Devil. The kids themselves weren't bedeviled, though they had roused un-dead devils to the angry alert.

It was antic, and it passed. It left nothing but echoes in the hills, and who can back-track the sounds that created echoes?

Nevertheless, the Judas had been correct. The four children went local again, and the Judas knew the location. It was in a flinty, thorny, small-bush place, acrid and angular in its formations, sharp and garish in its colors, having the illusion of an iron and wine taste, and the non-illusion (the powering presence) of a pungent and fetid odor.

The 'odor of sanctity' is not all lilacs and roses, nor is sanctity (the sacred, the sacer) a thing that stays within straited limits. It is too stark and rank for those limits. It pertains to holiness and sacredness; but also to awfulness; and further, to cursedness, to wickedness, execrability; to devotion; and again, to seizure and epilepsy.

Now the 'odor of sanctity', the smell of the thing (stay with us; strong smells and stench are the vitality itself), is compounded of the deepest

and most eroding of sweating, the sweating of blood and blood-serum; of nervous and speaking muck of adrenal rivers; of the excited fever of bodies and the quaking deliriums of minds; of the sharp sanity of igneous; and the bruised rankness of desert bush. Oh, it is a strong and lively stench. It's the smell of adoration, of passion seized in rigid aestivation.

Dan was prostrate on the flinty ground. Annina of the horns was on her broken and bleeding knees. She'd been driven to them, crashed to the earth onto them with a sudden force ten times her own weight. Azorro stood erect, or as erect as a fox can stand, with head thrown back, holding the sun in his gaze and letting it not move. Quick Mick sat nearly on the ground (possibly a slight distance above the ground) as though he were sitting lightly afloat in water, one foot dangling down and touching the stones. In his hands he held a large and apparently round object, half again the size of his head. That the object was invisible was no detriment; quite clearly it was solid and weighted.

All four of the children were taken there, by the Lions, by the Frizzes, who seized advantage of them in their ecstasy. It was as the Chained Philosopher had said: the children were unnaturally heavy in relation to the earth. It took eight or ten strong men to lift each child up from the earth and break his spell; to lift Azorro the fox out of his foxish rapture, to break Annina from knees onto her feet again; to separate the dangling toe of Quick Mick from casual flint earth. And there was sparking and blue corona at each separation.

But the men did not touch Dan. They came around him and bent to lift him from his prone position. But they hesitated. How was it that he shivered them all so that they held back from touching him? But Dan unproblemated the problem. He rose of himself, laughing and dusty, and went along with his three companions and their guards. They went to the place of judgment.

"Take off your shoes!" was the first thunderous judgment given when they had come to the place. It was one of the rough Lion-Men who gave this judgment and order. "None has shoes on free world for thirty years, except the devil's kin to disguise their cloven feet. This is the first judgment. Take them off!"

The judgment place was an open space by the furnaces, by the common pads, by the concert crater, a little to the north of the restless

ribbon.

“Shall we?” Quick Mick asked. He was asking Annina of the Horns, perhaps, and Dan; or he may have been asking someone a little taller than either. “There is something felt, somewhere, about holy ground, and about either wearing shoes or taking them off.”

“It’ll make the ground mighty hot,” Dan grinned with deadly seriousness. “Judge, have a care for your judgments.”

“It’ll scorch the ground for them, not for us,” cried Annina of the Horns. “Take them off, take them off! We’ll see how it goes.”

They were four bright and shining, and at the same time very dirty children. You don’t go into rapports in the flint-thorn-dust country and stay clean. The four of them took off their shoes. There was a slight anticipatory giggle from Quick Mick. And —

— And what a howling outrageous trick it was that they played! There was dark and gleaming delight in the very manifestation of their frightening powers. For the ground did become very hot: not for them, but for everybody else.

There is something undignified in the great Lion-Men, the Enforcers, dancing on one foot and then the other: and howling. And disordered dignity has always been the forte of these lawless rulers.

“Fox-fire running, cloned and downed, Singes the Lions and singes the ground.” Azorro’s laughing chant was very like fox-fire, and the horns on his temples were more like sticks of white fire than like hair now.

“Put them back on!” the biggest Lion of them all roared. And the children, in most insincere obedience, put their shoes back on. Ah, the ground had been burning hot for a long moment though! But had anybody noticed, had anybody ascertained in brief interval when the children had their shoes off, whether their feet were indeed cloven hoofs?

“The second part of the judgment is a question and a demand,” the biggest Lion roared, but a bit lamely now. “The question and the demand: Do you abjure the burning bush?’ We don’t remember the meaning of this, but we’re required to ask it.”

The four kids rolled eight eyes like rakish unmatched jewels at each other. Why, they had the Lions themselves inventing devices for them to use. This was too good to throw away.

“We adjure the burning bush completely,” Quick Mick gleed. “We fling it away from us. We’ll not see it with eyes. The true bush comes some

other while. Let all the false bush burn now for the backward sign of it!”

And the false bush burned. It burned hotly, quickly, searingly in more than five hundred points of discord. Chin-whiskers and chop-whiskers, bushwhackers and Fu Manchus, burnsides and brodignags, tom-balls and cascades, lank-locks and bush-heads, those bushes were on fire; beards and moustaches, manes and crines, long-hair and frizzhair were all aflame. And the fires were not beaten out until the kids said that they might be extinguished.

“That’s enough,” Annina of the Horns laughed the order after a bit. So the shattered people, the Jackal-People and the Lion-People, put out their own fires with whimpering and trepidation. Ah, it was pleasantly sharp, though, in the nostrils of the four children, if not of the furious folk: that acrid tang of scorched flesh and seared skin, that fuzzy and bitter smell of burnt hair. The horned children were now horned with rays of white light and were themselves almost radiant.

“The judgment goes on,” growled the largest and possibly the most scorched of the Lion-Men. “Now you will do the doings or you will die the deaths. Will you now take pot and hemp and acid and snow to show your solidity with the free people? To show that you’re not seed of the Devil?”

“I’ll not take them,” Annina sang.

“You others?”

“No. No. Never, scorched Lion, never,” the three male kids denied.

“Will you don the pig-wigs?” the Lion asked in rising thunder.

“We will not,” cried the children of the ray-light-horn temples.

“Will you Sing the Thing?” the Lion roared, and five hundred guitars strummed and whined in anticipation.

“We’ll not sing the Thing,” the four said.

“It would be a desecration of the Real Thing,” Dan explained.

The judgment place was in an open space by the common pads and the furnaces. The largest furnace had now been fired to seven times hot and was like molten liquid flame.

“We come very near to the end of it then,” the judging Lion said sadly, with that sadness that is peculiar to singed lions. “What is the name of your father?”

“Our father’s name may not be spoken,” Azorro stated. “Your father’s name is legion.”

“Your father’s name is Devil. He had hoofs and horns,” the big Lion

accused.

“Not so,” Quick Mick answered. “That one is your father, not ours. And all those things are the false brag of your father. His head isn’t holy enough to bear horns. His stubs aren’t earthy enough to have either feet or hoofs on the ends of them. He’s a hobble. He’s not lord of sky or earth or under-earth, not of any of them. He’s lord of lies and flies and order and disorder, but no other things. He’s not even lord of fire, for all his vaunt. He’s not even able to live in it in joy.”

“Are you able to?” the singed Lion asked with a flash of leonine humor.

“We are!” the kids shouted solidly.

“Your father is dead. That is the only fact of the world,” the Lion stated.

“Into the furnace with the four of them,” all the Jackal-People and “Dead Lion, tell us not who is dead,” Azorro laughed.

Lion-People cried.

“With the three of them,” the biggest Lion said. “Dan is a special case, a case not well understood. He’s to be eaten alive, and we special Lions will eat him. That’s the way it’s been ordained. Your tricks end now, evil children.”

“No. Our tricks begin now,” Annina contradicted. “You’d never have believed such tricks. Ah, the furnace! That’s a fun I hadn’t even thought of.”

So they all arranged for the judgment and the end of the thing.

Well, had the children hoofs on their feet? This hasn’t been quite settled.

Oh yes. They had shadows of hoofs, at least. They had shadows of pads and of claws also. Yes, and old vestiges of fish tails and even of dragon tails on their extremities. But what they had really and finally, and not as vestige, was fine feet.

And horns on their heads, real horns, white-fire horns, white-light horns, Moses-horns!

Danny was surrounded by two dozen large and savage men who’d eat him alive with their very teeth. They were in a passion for it. No, that is not strictly accurate. Daniel had two dozen trembling and fearful Lion-Men of the streets surrounded. Their teeth chattered, but were they chattering Out of fear or were they chattering to eat Dan alive?



And the other three prepared to step into the seven-times hot molten flame of the furnace.

“Stand you back, the people,” Annina called. “We come to our high-tricks now. When we go into the fire you’ll see some fun. But stand back or you’ll be crisped by it.”

“Stand how far back?” the people hooted.

“A hundred meters, a thousand, a mile of meters,” Annina called. “And that won’t be enough.”

“Burn, kids, burn,” the people mocked. “The furnace is seven times brick and seven times stone and seven times iron. Burn, seed, burn.” But some of the more timid ones did stand back, far back.

Not far enough, though. The children stepped down into the molten fire and the fun began. And the people reeled back in abysmal fear. A hundred meters back. A thousand.

A mile of meters back.

It wasn’t far enough back though.

## BERRYHILL

A house, it is said, is not a home until it has known a birth, a wedding, and a death. So Berryhill was not a home, though the Berrymans had lived in it for sixty years. The Berrymans were people who were not born, never married, and apparently did not die.

In every town of less than a thousand persons in this nation, there is a decayed house on the outskirts that has given rise to eerie stories. Eerie stories find their natural home in small towns, for a ghost population is always largest where the human population is smallest; and the ghosts take over completely when the humans disappear.

The stories of the Berrymans were of long growth. Not only were the Berrymans peculiar old people; there were other oldsters in town who remembered when they had been peculiar young people. The three of them, two brothers and a sister, were tight recluses. They had no friends; they did not mingle at all with the people of the town. When one of them was even seen outside of their house, it was an event to be reported. It was never known for certain whether all of them were still alive. A year, two years might go by when a certain one of them had not been seen at all. But, soon or late, sight would be had of all of them, never together: Nehemias with his black beard, Habacuc with his white, Sophronia in her ancient dress and wearing what was perhaps the last sunbonnet in the world. They were still alive for a while yet.

But nobody in town ever seemed pleased to learn that they still lived. There was no kind thought for them, certainly no compassion for these old folks. They were apart, repelled, unfriended, and unchurched.

But what was really so odd about them, besides their keeping to themselves? Well, for one thing, for three things, there were the three graves, three rocked pits anyhow that were believed to be graves. It was said also that there were three gravestones at the heads of the empty pits, and that these stones were carved with the names of the three Berrymans, and with the dates of their deaths given. By one account, these dates were impossibly far in the future. But, by another story, the dates were coming up very soon, in this very year.

Harvey Hinkle had himself read these inscriptions (or he said that he had), and he told about them. But Harvey was dead now. Matthew Moon had likewise seen them, according to his son; Matthew likewise was dead.

There was nobody now living who had ever gone near enough to read the stones, or even to know if there were such stones and pits.

The other oddity of the Berrymans was their manner of survival. No supplies of any kind had gone into that place for many years, perhaps not forever.

They had, it is true, a pumpkin patch. They had what may have been a vegetable garden behind its high screen of weeds. They had, in season, a few straggling rows of corn, crazy and uneven; boys who had stolen some of it said that the ears were mottled and the kernels purple like squaw corn. And the Berryman kept goats; spooky, unhappy goats, unrelated to the lively town goats.

But nobody really believed that it was on such paltry stuff that they lived. There must be a better, and if not a better than a more interesting, explanation.

Indeed the Berrymans dined but once a year. This was the most persistent ~ nd flavorsome of all the stories about them. And they dined, they dined on stranger. Those who had disappeared over the years were numerous. There were the tinker who always came yearly, and now he came no more. There had been Ragged Dan the old tramp. He used to come to town every spring, but when was the last time he had been seen? There was the wandering darky who had been seen going to town by two different farmers; going on the high road to town. But he was not seen in town; he was never seen again at all. There were the three Gypsies who had wagoned off the road north of town not three hundred yards from Berryhill. And the next day there were only two of the Gypsies. Where was their brother? the towns-people asked the Gypsies. They did not know; somehow he had become lost; they did not know where he went, they said. But the towns-people knew.

And if there had been these well-authenticated disappearances, how many more must have remained unknown? There was Sheila Cotter, said to have runaway with a cattle-buyer. How would she have run away? What cattle-buyer? If the truth were only known, she had been eaten by the Berrymans. It is no wonder that the towns-people had no love for them.

2.

It was a Friday evening and the Lost Creek Bobcats had held one of their irregular meetings. The Bobcats formed one of the most secret clubs

in the world, having only two members: Jimmy Ware and Paul Potter, one nine years old, one nine and a half.

It was an oath-bound society, unknown to the world; yet it had caused a wave of destruction in its ten day existence. It was the Bobcats who had hamstrung that sheep belonging to the Millers. It was they who had thrown offal down Tomkin's well, fouling the water. It was they who had broken the great branch of Johnson's apple tree with the blossoms still on it. They had released the pigeons from Hickman's cote; they had broken the dam in Merton's meadow; they had partly burned one of Conner's straw-stacks. It didn't burn well; it was too damp.

Now, however, the club was split down the middle and dissolved in black anger.

"I won't go with you, Jimmy," Paul Potter said. "I'll find a way to stop you. And if you do go, I'll tell on you. You're crazy to even talk about doing it."

"You're afraid, Paul. You're a black-bellied coward."

"I ate the toad stool you said was poison. I was the one caught the barn-owl with my bare hands."

"You're afraid. You're a red-gizzardered, slobbering, wet-your-pants coward."

"I maybe a coward but I won't go with you to do it. They'll kill you if they catch you."

"Besides, you don't know what I'm going to do."

"I know exactly what you're going to do. You've talked about it enough."

"Yes, I guess you do."

"I'll go tell your mother."

"It'll be too late to stop me. Nothing can stop me, and I have Pete in my pocket and Mike in my belt."

"It's the devil in you wants you to go in there. They'll kill you when they catch you."

"Maybe they won't catch me at all. It's getting dark, little boy. You'd better go on home. Run all the way. It gets dark real fast."

So Paul Potter ran home crying, but he knew he would not be in time to get help. And Jimmy Ware waited only a little while, till night came down like a curtain.

Then he walked to Berryhill.

A spooky house is spooky even to a stubborn boy. And in one respect Berryhill always gave an outlandish impression: it seemed to be growing out of the ground. A cottonwood post set in a fence row will sometimes take root and leaf out again; a hackberry will do the same. But here it seemed as though the wood of the house itself had never stopped growing. It was just that it was crawled all over with vines, and chinked up with old moss; but, coming on it at night, it was like a great hollow tree bole, uprooted, overturned, and then overgrown. It had the smell of slugs and lizards and of swamp weeds in the spring night

Well, such things never really harmed. Yet it was rough going even to approach the old house. It seemed to be surrounded by its own special darkness, miasmal, heavier than the night itself. And, in fact, the house was surrounded by such more rank vegetation than the adjacent region. Moreover, the approaches were uneven, ill-drained, sour, and somewhat dangerous.

There is shock in total sudden contrast, coming on a wrong thing clear-cut and distinct. But there is a more creeping kind of shock in coming gradually upon an indistinct and formless monstrosity until one is nearly in the middle of it. A stark white ghost paralyzes with sudden fright. The indistinct gray specter takes over with a slower paralysis; yet it seizes no less completely. And it such a vague gray ghost that Jimmy slowly came onto now. He had thought at first that it was a bush, till he had passed into its half-yielding substance and felt the living hair on it in the dark.

He twisted back then, with that clattering, devilish cry ringing in his head, and he thought that the gray devil had him. Even in hell there is no sound to compare with it; it is the mad night noise that lifts the hair right off the head and gives the shakes to Satan himself.

Even after he realized what it was, Jimmy was unsettled. A goat, after all, is half devil, and these gaunt gray goats of the Berryhills were disquieting to come onto in the dark. Moreover, they had a high old smell on them as though they were graveyard creatures. A sudden goat-bleat in the dark has the final quality of the judgment horn. But for all that, Jimmy went boldly up on the porch of the old house and scouted over the rotten boards and the warped, uneven, weed-slimed surface. Had he been heavier, there were places where he would have broken through the porch entirely.

Neither of the stagger-shuttered windows gave a view within at all, and there was no trace of light. But the door itself was neither locked nor latched. It gave to the push, but very heavily, as though it were seldom opened.

Within, the old swamp smell was still stronger, and now there appeared just a memory of light. It was as if the house had swallowed a lantern, and it shone through the tissues of its monstrous belly.

Jimmy explored deep into the dark house, and then he stood solid at a turning where there was enough light to make a clear way. The aura of the uncanny was heavy in the place, and Jimmy stood there dogged.

The encounter was made. And then there was no withdrawing.

It was a black-bearded giant, tall as a straw-stack and thin as a pitchfork. "What is it? What's this?" Black-beard croaked. "Habacuc, come see! I believe it's a boy."

"How would there be a boy?" came the other voice out of a white beard floating by itself out of the darkness. "Likely it's a possum you've caught. they've been in the boards between the ceiling and the floor above. You can tell by the tail if it's a possum."

"It doesn't have a tail. I tell you it's a boy. Come with me to the light, boy. You'll be just in time for supper. It's been a long time since we had a boy here."

Jimmy Ware followed the black-bearded and the white-bearded old men down a dungeon-like stairs, to a lighted cellar room below.

"Sophronia, look, we have a boy!" they called.

"What? I don't know when we've last had a boy here. And just in time for supper too. My, it's been a long time since we've had a boy for supper!" said Sophronia.

Nehemias the black-bearded hung a kerosene lantern on a rafter to light the table. It was a might rough splintered table, and Sophronia set it there with huge pot-metal plates; pewter they were. At each place she set a horn-handled knife and a roast-skewering fork. But there was no food on the table.

"Boy," said Habacuc the white-beard, "you have no idea how glad we are to have you here tonight. Yes, it's been a long time since we've had a boy for supper."

There is a trick that old kerosene lanterns have. There are places in a room that they will not light up at all, and there are corners where the

darkness is all the deeper for the light being there. There were the three old folks and Jimmy in the cellar room; and evil stood like a servitor waiting to be released.

“Boy,” said Nehemias, “I wonder if you’d lend a hand at this grindstone here The carving knife need sharpening. Let us set to work with a will while Sophronia keeps the water at a boil.”

Jimmy turned the grindstone; and Nehemias held the foot-long knife while sparks cascaded and the smell like burnt sulfur or brimstone was about the wheel.

“Nehemias,” whined Habacuc in his fluted voice, “have you seen the bone-saw?”

“On the peg right behind you. But I doubt if we’ll need it much. I believe the joints will pop easily without it. It won’t be a big carcass or heavily-boned. Boy, you may as well get ready. The knife is as sharp as it will ever be, and we will make a special occasion of this. Habacuc, it must be years since we’ve had a boy for supper. Right at a year since we’ve had anyone at all. Sophronia, how are you coming with it?”

“Nearly ready to set it on. My this will be a good supper! And I’ll have a blood-pudding to go with the flesh meat.”

Then evil was no longer a servitor and would no more be controlled. It rose up, the master, and it worked its havoc in the room.

Jimmy Ware disdained to use Pete, the snub-nosed pistol; perhaps it was not operable. He had never fired it. He carried it for effect. He took Mike, the razor-sharp hatchet, from his belt. The dim-eyed old folks had no idea of the danger they had been in. The two old men set to the board and howed their heads in grace; and Jimmy struck, first Nehemias of the black beard, then Habacuc of the white.

The old skulls broke like eggs to the blows of the strong boy. And as Sophronia tottered in with the boiled goat on a great trencher, he hacked her down also. Then every bond burst and the red evil was all through him like sulfur fire.

“Paul said they’d kill me if they caught me. Let them kill me! Let them hang me! It was worth it. Paul was afraid to help me kill the old fossils. Now I have them all to myself. I get to kill all three. What do I care if they catch me afterwards?”

Murder was there in his proper form, and Jimmy Ware was possessed completely. He hacked the life out of the old three, as he had planned for

so long. Nehemias groaned in his dying sleep, and Habacuc whimpered like a crushed dog. Sophronia made little bird sounds as she died.

Jimmy hacked as the blood welled with its sharp metallic smell, and it was on his hands with a slickness more like graphite than grease or liquid. The three harmless old relics lay still.

And Jimmy Ware began to laugh and could not stop. He had done what he planned. Now he had everything he wanted.



## THOU WHITED WALL

*False coinage will always drive true coinage  
to the wall, as it were.*

*—Tully Ficticius*

“The wall washers are coming rather late tonight,” Evangeline Gilligan said. “Oh, I can see that it’s going to be one of those days! It’s already four thirty in the morning by Eastern time. They’re doing a good job though. Ah, but it’s nice to be a guided person and have — so much working for you. Who will hit the wall first today?” “The smart money’s on the Rooky Duke,” said Evangeline’s husband Mudge Gilligan. “But the smart money was also on Northside Public in Chicago for the wall of the night, and it turns out to be the Great North Wall of the men’s room of Monorail Central in Atlanta.” Mudge recognized walls more readily than Evangeline did. The wall washers came every late night or early morning to clean and white all the big-name walls of the country. They went over those walls with their sophisticated paintwashes and their broad electric brushes. They obliterated every picture and scribble from those walls and left the stark and challenging surfaces in their clean emptiness. It was always a question which would be the prime wall for a coming day (this information was never leaked) and which of the prophetic artists would score first hit on the designated wall with his message. Many local people watched local walls and guided their lives by the messages that appeared on them. But the wide world watched the prime wall. But there were always marks breaking through on the walls between the time of the wall washing and the hit of the first prophet. It was the case of the stronger of yesterday’s drawings and writings fighting their way out through those paint-washes and splaying themselves black and beetling on the new clean surface. There was a never-say-die spirit to the more meaningful of the old drawings, writhing and fighting their way through. And they changed in their struggles. Comparative pictures showed that the graphia were somewhat different in their emerging state from what they had been when they were submerged by the wall washing. And then the new day’s pictures and scribbles began to appear even before human hands could reach the wall. And this day, as revealed by the vision-set from Atlanta, the Rooky Duke scored first. “Good!” Mudge Gilligan cried out as he

watched. "I'm always afraid of the Rook, but if he's first he can't hurt me, I've got the third tonight, and if that had been the Rook I'd probably have died. There's only one worse than the Rooky Duke for me this session, the way the fates are falling." Quite often lately, the Rooky Duke had been scoring first, with electric or ectoplasmic hands. The cameras caught a little bit of the fogginess of such ghost hands that splashed their signatures and messages on prime walls before the surge of great-name but purely human artists could reach them. The Rooky Duke had left his flaming message there, and it meant the deaths of very many people. But Mudge Gilligan was not riding on the Rook for a first. The Putty Dwarf scored immediately after. "Two down!" Mudge cried in half relief and half fear. "That's two of the three who might have killed me. And I have the next coming up, but the odds are strong against all three of my worst death-threats coming up the first three." Mudge shook though, as if the odds were a little bit closer on the thing. "Why do you take such risks, dear?" Evangeline asked her husband. "I'd think it would worry you sick." "It does. But there's a pretty good sum of money in the pot by this time. Only one in the pot can win and it's got to be me soon. There's only five of us left." "And only one in the pot can lose — can lose his life, that is," Evangeline said, "and it's got to be you soon. Why did you join up this time?" "You remember the fortune I got — Live dangerously, reap the stuff, and die if you lack luck enough. And, Evangeline, nobody can escape his fortune, and four men have already died in it, and the PC has built up to twelve dollars. It's worth the risk. What other chance have I to avoid being a poor man all my life?" The Rooky Duke and the Putty Dwarf had already hit. And now the third prophet, hit — "Oh, no, no!" Mudge howled in terror as he recognized the third ghostly hand that was writing on the camera'd wall. "Is he really so bad for you, dear?" Evangeline asked. "He is the death of me," Mudge moaned, for the third of the prophets to score was the Gloaty Throat. "At least read the message," Evangeline urged. "It might not be death after all."

But the handwriting on the wall read: Anoint your head and leave your brood, and use what came in the breakfast food.

This message didn't mean a lot to the millions of viewers, but it came through strong to Mudge Gilligan. "All I can do is make an end to it," Mudge whimpered. He knew that his little boy Hiero had got a vein opener in the last box of breakfast food and that the Gloaty Throat was

referring to it. "This is good-by, Evangeline," he said. "Don't touch me, please," she protested. "Your hands are always so sweaty when you are scared, and you are so acid. You know I don't like you to touch me when your hands are sweaty." Mudge Gilligan went quickly and anointed his head. Then he got Hiero's vein opener and he opened his veins and died. "Oh, I can see that this is going to be one of those days," Evangeline said.

With the real mind explosion, most of the more intelligent people had gone beyond high astrology and had begun to tie their fortunes to the handwriting on the walls, to the pictures, to the messages. And the Handwriting on the Wall had already become a great and established institution. As the only prehuman graphic communication, it had always remained somewhat monkey-handed, and its prophetic element had not become soaringly interspecies. It was real understanding, the stuff that was splashed on the walls and became psycho-dyked there. This was gut-art. This was what the great Charles Puncheon had called transcendent drivel. This was seraphic scribbling. And it was creative prediction. The emphasis on wall writing was not to abrogate high astrology but to fulfill it. All the great prophet-artists of the whited walls are planetary personages, and all the scientific backing of high astrology applies to transcendent wall writing also. No good name had ever been found to describe the excellence and many-leveled meaning of this testimony on the walls. It had been called kakographia and syngramma and scribble-schnibble. It had been called zograpia and ektyposis and ochsenskeiber. It had been called chromatisma and schediasma and oscenite. It had been called scherzi and motfi and asynartesia. The Italians have called it graffita, and the name may have stuck. But it became more than just a complex of things that dirty little boys wrote on walls. Now it was things that dirty big boys wrote, and these boys were the prophetic artist-heroes who came to the top by power and genius and scheming and creative duplicity and murder. The twelve zodiacal signs had once been "set" things that were not subject to change. But the twelve prophets of the whited walls were twelve kings of the mountains who came to the top and flung others down to their destruction. They were the reincarnations of the prophets of the twelve tribes of Israel; they were the embodiments of the twelve planets; they were the twelve apostles; and they were the twelve signs from the sky. These mighty ones accepted every challenge, and many of them lived at the apex for several

years. There were no living, former members of this highest circle of the prophetic artists: to fall from the twelve was to fall to death. At this time, the high twelve were: The Rooky Duke, the Putty Dwarf, the Tutti Fruit, the Demogorgon, the Braggin Dragon, the Gloaty Throat, the Creature Preacher, Joe Snow, the Spanish Fly, Hu Flung, the Moving Finger, and the Turning Worm.

“Mother, father has opened his veins and bled to death all over everything,” small son Hiero Gilligan was hollering. Hiero’s early stridence always gave an unpleasant cast to a morning. “Yes, dear,” his mother Evangeline told him, “but be tolerant. it is his personal privilege.” “Personal privilege. nothing!” Hiero exploded. “I never said that papa could use my vein opener. He should have asked me first. I wish people would leave my things alone.” “I’ll get you another one if you really want to use it, dear,” Evangeline offered. “No, I wouldn’t want to use it now,” Hiero pouted. “The shine’s all gone off the idea.” The Gilligans had given their little boy Hiero everything, but he had always been hard to please.

There were those (unguided persons all) who said that the walls and all their fruits were nonsense and that the science behind the prophetic messages was pseudo-science. These unguided folks said that the guided persons were probably insane and that they were wrecking the very apparatus of society with their aggressive ignorance. They said that production had already broken down because of the great numbers of unproductive wall watchers and that already there were not enough of the necessities to go around to everybody. Well, no, there wasn’t enough for everybody, but there was enough for the guided people. They had their power and their numbers. Who was going to dispute them, the fortune-cookie people?

The Spanish Fly had just hit the prime wall, and it was carried to all the other big-name walls. The Fly could not hit in a number of places at one time, as could the Rooky Duke or the Putty Dwarf or the Gloaty Throat. These were camera reproductions of the Fly message on the secondary walls. He wasn’t a multi-presence entity. He hadn’t either electric or ectoplasmic hands. He had to be at the wall he actually hit. So he was at the Great North Wall of the men’s room of Monorail Central in Atlanta. But the Spanish Fly did have successive bodies. He had to have. He used up a body every time he hit. He had hit now on the prime wall with a sudden and spectacular splotch of blood and viscera. And the

great blotch was himself entire: the blotch was the Spanish Fly. The gory stuff slid down the wall and it spelled out its message as it did so:

I am an insect spilled; this is my all. in my red, fulfilled on whited wall.

There was always a wistful tone to the Spanish Fly's death messages, and there was a wonder how he was able to spell out the message when he came to his last extremity. His enduring classic communication, of course, had been those slow-beat words:

Blood, bone, gore, pith, reek and rot. Here I go with all I've got.

But death splatterings lose a little of their excellence when they are repeated every night or morning. The Spanish Fly always said that he was really the planet Mercury, but in his present manifestation he had been born in Spain, Idaho. Jealous and edgedtooth persons said that his use of the throwaway bodies was a conjure and a trick.

"Who's going to bury papa?" Hiero Gilligan asked his mother.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe I will have an intuition on how to get it done." "Who are you on this morning?" "I'm playing a double. The Demogorgon and Joe Snow." "But you aren't smart enough to play a double, mama."

Hu Flung had hit. Hu Flung's messages were always in the medium of thrown ordure. It globbed on the wall, and the words it spelled out were always gross.

The Demogorgon hit. The Demogorgon was probably the least of the reigning twelve. Only a sustained rumor as to who he really was gave him any stature at all. And his messages didn't mean much to the multitude, but this one meant a little bit to Evangeline:

Oh bury your dead and run and run! But where will you head for luck and Fun?

"Well where will you head to find them, mama?" Hiero asked. "I don't know. I'll intuit something in a little while. Who are you on today?" "The Braggin Dragon."

A dozen challengers from the stratum below the High Twelve had hit on the Great North Wall in Atlanta, the prime wall of the day. And ten thousand other challengers had hit on a thousand other walls. Oh, the world would never run out of talent with so many powerful ones rising like giant waves every morning. Most of these were one-timers, but some of them had sustained power. Joe Snow hit!

But Joe was always a time bomb. His hits were delayed messages. He hit with snow-shot, white on white, and his messages could not be read immediately. But his communications always caused flurries of intuitions in all who were on him for that day. And later in the day, when the whited walls had become dirty and speckled, his messages could be read as they stood out in stark white from dingy gray. "I have an intuition from Joe Snow," Evangeline said, and she rose to follow it. "But your intuitions on Snow are always wrong," the little boy Hiero argued, "and when the messages finally come clear, they are never anything like you guessed." "Never mind," said Evangeline. "I have to start somewhere, and I will start with this intuition." Evangeline went by the place of Violet Anemone Rhodina, a widowwoman of the town. "Your roses look bad, Vi," Evangeline told her. "I believe that there is something a little bit lacking in them. I've been worrying about them." "And your psychology seems to be a little bit lacking, Ev," Violet said. "What do you want from me and how much will it put me out?" "Like all the guided people, I am a giver and not a taker," Evangeline said. "Do you know when it was that your roses looked the best they ever have? It was in the months after you buried your husband in your rose garden." "Yes, of course. He gave my garden three flourishing years. There was never a man with so much to contribute as my husband. The earth is richer for him." "My own husband died about half an hour ago, Vi. I think he made a mistake, but he went by his own free choice. Now, I was wondering whether —" "I'm afraid that he's too acid, Ev. He always looked like a very acidic man to me, and too much acid isn't good for roses." "Oh, no, Vi. I don't believe he was ever acid at all." "Didn't his hands used to sweat a lot? Wasn't he a compulsive gambler? Both may be signs of a highly acid condition." "Oh, what will I do with him? What will I do?" Evangeline moaned. "I'd like to help you, Ev, and I'm willing to be convinced. If you can bring me a certificate that his condition wasn't overly acidic, then of course you can bury him in my rose garden." "Oh, I will try to get a certificate from someone today," Evangeline said. Then she went by Gimbal's where she worked. She hadn't been by there very often lately, but she thought that someone there might help her through a bad day. "Oh, I fired you a week ago, Mrs. Gilligan," Selkirk Gimbal told her. "I'd have told you before, but you haven't been in here since I fired you. Don't look at me so blank. You don't work here any more. You never seem to comprehend what I say, but

how else can I tell you that you're fired and that you don't work here any more?" "That's your problem, Selkirk. We guided persons never have any trouble in expressing ourselves. I'm going to have to take a few days off. I have a husband to dispose of, and I have all sorts of intuitions to sort out. And I'm going down to Atlanta today to examine the prime wall of record. I'll try to get in here a little while next week." "No hurry, Evangeline. You don't work here any more." "I'll forgive you for that remark, Selkirk, remembering that you are an unguided person." "It may be that we unguided persons get along as well as you guided ones." "Of course you don't get along as well as we do, Selkirk. Notice yourselves sometime. You simply don't have our depth. We guided ones are the prestressed people, and we can never be unbalanced. And we have our power." The guided people of the walls had been given twelve extra sensors-at-large, one for the followers of each prophet-artist. This gave, almost always, a special tilt in affairs towards the guided people. And they had been given many other things. The unguided persons were those who did not order their lives according to the handwriting on the walls. They hadn't the scientific understanding to bring them to that. They hadn't the planetary disposition for it. In every society there will be the guided elites, and there will be the unguided commonality. And the whited walls, those screens for projecting things from beyond by means of the artist-prophets, were the guides for the guided.

About midday, Evangeline received a report that might have been disquieting to her if she had not been one of the guided ones. She learned that her small son Hiero, along with three companions, had opened a new option kit that was to have been the gift to one of them for his next name day. This option kit was a very sophisticated one and should not have been given to small children without caution. But they had opened it and they had played with it. And all four of them had optioned out. Of course, self-destruction is a personal privilege for persons of all ages, but the act itself is peculiarly poignant with small children. All four of the boys were on the Braggin Dragon that day. That might be significant. They all looked nice though, as Evangeline was told, and each of them held in his little dead hand one of those motto flags such as come in those kits, with the words It's a world I never made. "It's too bad that children have to grow up so soon," Evangeline said to herself. And then it seemed that her lament was incorrect since Hiero hadn't really grown up at all. "Oh,

certainly, it's all right," Violet Rhodina said. "I'm letting them bury all four of the little boys in my rose garden. Little boys are seldom hyperacidic."

Evangeline Gilligan took a fly-by to Atlanta. She wanted to see the wall of the day. In Atlanta at Monorail Central she came upon the Demogorgon himself sorrowfully drinking coffee and eating a roll and a bowl of squid brains at one of the tet cafes.

"I always thought you were a natural," she jibed, "and here you are eating squid brains." "I am an un-natural," the Demogorgon said, "but I have a right to these. These are devil-fish brains, and I am the devil himself." The Demogorgon had always insisted, in the face of derision and disbelief, that he was the one and original devil and as such was unnatural and antinatural. Some of the great prophet-artists were natural in their gifts; but some used artificial enhancement, either special diet or brain surgery, to build up their talents. The surgery always removed several pounds of brain matter that might prove distracting to the talents, and it introduced other matter from the organs and brains of other species and from rogue humans. The special diets consisted of daily eating of these same types of organs and brains. The highest item on the diet lists was squid brains. The squids, living in it entirely, had a finer understanding of the great oceanic unconscious than had people of any other species. And the squids also had a primordial understanding of writing on walls. Their inky ejections were true communication-writing, and they did have whited walls very deep in the oceans that they wrote upon with their propelled ink. The squids are not a degenerate species that writes sequentially one letter or one word after another. They eject an entire gloopy message at one time upon the walls. "Who are you on today?" the Demogorgon mouthed around a glob of brains. "Yourself and Joe Snow," Evangeline told him. "He's the second half of my daily double." "There's always a delay about Joe," the Demogorgon said. "His messages are not clear till a contrasting background builds up. And even after they are clear, they still are not very clear. Why doesn't everyone get on me alone? I'm the best of them all. I am pleased to see that you have had troubles today." "Not bad ones. Or not good ones, as it would be from your view point. You really are the devil, aren't you? It's just that the man I work for keeps telling me that I'm fired, and it's just that my husband died this morning from a foolish antic and I have no place to bury him.



He has an acid condition, I think, and that's bad for some plants. People won't let you bury an acid man in their gardens." "Aren't there any necrophagists in your town? They are likely breaking down the doors of your place right now to feed on him. They don't mind acidity." "They're too particular lately though. They'd eat a few choice parts of him and then I'd be stuck with the rest. And the dogs are almost as bad. There's so many parts that they like to play with but won't eat up." "Consider lilac bushes," the really devil said. "Consider blue berry shrubs. I must go now. I have to oppress widows and orphans and defraud laborers. And there's several small children of both sexes that I must rape. It's an old pleasure that's coming back into favor. And take a careful took at my own latest message on the wall. It's rather excellent. Bad-bye, madam." "You are outmoded. You know that," Evangeline said. "And you're outrotted in so many ways." "It's a case of the false coin driving out the true again," the Demogorgon said.

Evangeline went down to view the Great North Wall. She had to wear a man's hat to go down there: that was the rule. They had hats available at a little booth. Oh, there is always so much of the local prophetic-art in Atlanta and places like that. But some of it is good. Persons were at work with cameras and scanners and code breakers and calculators on many of the messages, squeezing the last drop of guidance out of them. The message of Joe Slow was still there on the prime wall. The background of it had darkened somewhat, but it was still too much white-on-white to be read. And Joe Snow himself was there. "How good are lilac bushes for an acid husband?" Evangeline asked him. "How good are blueberry shrubs?" "Rhubarb is the best," Joe Snow said thickly. Joe was snowed. "Why didn't I think of rhubarb? When will the background of your message darken enough to make it readable?" Evangeline asked. "I've got to catch a fly-by home in an hour." "Perhaps the message won't be readable today at all," the thick-tongued Joe Snow mumbled. "Amateur artists are careless and they are writing over my message. I try to chase them away, but as the afternoon goes on I get sleepy and then there is no one to chase them off. But imprint my message on your mind and hold it there. The snow-colored message itself will not darken, but your mind will become gray and grimy by evening. The contrast will enable you to read it." "Thank you," Evangeline said. "Things are much easier when one avails herself of guidance."

Evangeline then had a liaison and affair with a gentleman who was also on Joe Snow and Demogorgon for the daily double. The liaison and affair took something more than half an hour. Then Evangeline caught a fly-by to go back home. And when she was back in her home city, she went immediately to Reuben's Rhubarb Patch. "I have an acid husband," she told Reuben. "And, oh, your rhubarb does look as if it needs acid!" "That's my poke-weed patch," Reuben said. "This is my rhubarb on the other side. Oh, bring him along and bury him, I guess. He can't hurt the soil much." So the remains of Mudge Gilligan were quickly buried at Reuben's.

"Oh, how right everything is going today!" Evangeline chortled. "And I thought that things would be bad. I guess that things almost always go right for guided persons. I may as well settle my other problem." She went by the place where she worked. "I have decided to forgive you for your bad manners of today, Selkirk," she told the man she worked for. "You are an unguided person, so I must make allowances. But you know how much trouble you'd get into firing even an unguided person. There's a dozen agencies who'd battle you to the last drop of your blood. And we guided persons are much more powerful." "You don't work here any more, Evangeline. Get out!" "I am on a double these days. I am on the Demogorgon, and I am also on Joe Snow. This will not mean much to an unguided and unscientific person such as yourself, but I assure you that those are the two strongest lobbies of all the wall people. And remember, Selkirk, that this is payday. Shell, man, shell!" "Out, Evangeline, out!" Selkirk ordered, but he ordered with much less strength than usual. He was nine parts beat already, and with real pressure put on him he'd cave in. "I'll be back within the hour, Selkirk," Evangeline said. "And I believe that a little bonus added to my pay would be a nice gesture. It's almost imperative that unguided persons make such nice gestures regularly."

Evangeline went down to the local Southside Sewage Plant wall, a fine expanse. The Turning Worm had just hit for the first time that day, and his had generated some excitement. The Turning Worm was not a prophet of multiple presence, and this was not a prime wall here, but the reproduction was good. And the reproduction of the Joe Snow message was good, but there was still not enough contrast to make it readable. Evangeline had that snow-message imprinted on her own mind, however, and her mind had now become gray and grimy enough to give contrast.

And she read:

Oh make it proud and make it sly! Be grassed, be snowed, be hempty,  
and hold your head almighty high although your head be empty.

Evangeline Gilligan walked proudly and with high head. She felt an everlasting compassion for all the unguided and unscienced people of the world, all those who were not prestressed, all who were not people of the walls. The guided persons much working for them! The wall washers would be around again in a few hours to white the walls for new messages and for another wonderful new day.

## FALL OF PEBBLE-STONES

*And heal my heart and bless my bones  
With nightly fall of pebble-stones.*

*Ellenbogen  
—Rainy Morning Rimes.*

Bill Sorel stood at his nineteenth-floor window and shied pebbles and stones out over space to land in the sidewalk and street. It had rained the night before, and there were pebbles on that little ledge under his window after every rain. It's always fun to throw stones, even small stones, in the morning and see what they will hit.

"Hey, that cop's going to come up and get you again, Bill Sorel," Etta Mae Southern called from her window next door. "Where were you last night? I called every guy I know for a date and couldn't get anybody. You remember the other day the cop came all the way up to your place and told you the people in the street were getting crabby about getting hit on the head with pebbles."

"I have been awarded the big red plum, Etta Mae," Sorel boasted to the early morning air and his neighbor. "I'm not a professor; I'm not a doctor: I'm just a hardworking and dirty-scheming popularizer and feature writer. But I have wrested the big red plum from the big boys in the Q. and A. scientific field."

"Well, don't throw the plum-pit down on someone's head when you're finished," Etta Mae said. "You told that cop, 'They're not very big pebbles,' and he said, 'No, I know they're not.' You told him, 'People just like to complain about things,' and he said, 'Yeah, I know they do. Now you just cut out hitting people on their heads with pebbles so they'll have one less thing to complain about.' You said, 'How did you know it was me?' and he said, 'Who else in this building would be a mad pebble-thrower?' He sure is a nice cop but I bet he won't be so nice if he has to come all the way up here after you again."

"I've been awarded the big red plum," Sorel repeated, and he continued to pick the pebbles out of that little ledge below his window and throw them down over the street. "I have been selected to compile, edit, write or whatever The Child's Big What and Why Book. This will pay

me well. All I have to do is answer the scientific questions that children of all ages will ask, and do it in the style that the most doltish kid can understand and the smartest kid will not find patronizing. And really most of the work is done before I start.”

“You hit a man with a pebble, Bill. He’s looking around to see where it came from. He’s on the edge of being real mad if he finds out someone hit him on purpose.”

“I didn’t,” Sorel said. “I discovered that I can’t hit any of them on purpose, so I concentrate on hitting them by accident. I just throw them and let them find their own targets. But it wasn’t a very big pebble and it didn’t hurt him much. Now all I have to do is find out half an answer to one question and a full answer to another, and I’ll be able to put the book together. Where do you think the pebbles come from, Etta Mae?”

“My idea is that the rain makes them. Pebbles are made out of silicon mostly. And silicon and nitrogen are almost exactly alike. I used to go with a smart fellow and he taught me things like that. When it lightens, the rain makes almost as much silicon water as nitrogen water, and it deposits it as pebbles. That’s one way. Hey, do you know that rotten people never have pebbles around their houses? The other way is that little pieces of sand come together and the lightning-impregnated water fuses them into pebbles. It has to be one of those ways or there wouldn’t always be pebbles after it rains. There’s a third way that pebbles could happen, but it’s a little bit doubtful.”

“Tell me the third way, Etta Mae. I have to consider lots of fringe things for the Big What and Why Book.”

“It’s that somebody doesn’t want you to run out of pebbles because you have so much fun throwing them. So, whoever it is, he keeps making pebbles for you every time it rains. You know Mrs. Justex on the eighteenth floor. She always used to live in a house before she came here, and she had a little ledge outside her kitchen window where her milk would be left every morning. She took the apartment here and saw that there wasn’t any ledge. ‘Have you got milk?’ she asked herself. So she nailed up a little ledge like the one you fixed for yourself there. And every morning there would be a quart of milk for her on the ledge. This went on for a week till she happened to think, ‘Who is my route man here? And how does he get up to the eighteenth floor on the outside of this building?’ She heard him then — it was early in the morning — and she

went to see. She opened the window suddenly and knocked him off. He fell down and was killed on the sidewalk. But he faded away, and there wasn't anything left of him when she went down to look. After that, she had to start buying her milk in the store."

"No, Etta Mae, I know Mrs. Justex. That's just one of the stories she tells when she's wet-braining it in the Wastrels' Club."

"It did seem kind of doubtful. I don't believe she drinks milk at all. What is the half an answer and the whole answer that you have to find out before you can put the book together?" "The half one is, 'Why does a baseball curve?' I think I have that all whipped. I'm going to see a man today who is supposed to know the answer. And the whole answer I'm looking for is to the question, 'How do the pebbles get under the eaves?'"

"Oh, well, it's got to be one of the three ways I told you."

Bill Sorel stood there at the window and threw every pebble away. That is important. He didn't miss a one. Then he got a little broom and swept that ledge clear of everything. Bill Sorel should have had an easy job of putting that book together. He already knew all the answers except for that half answer and that full answer. He had once handled a lot of the questions in a little daily feature before it was canceled out on him. He could use that material again. And most of the other answers he had already filed in his head for ready use. Besides, there were already many such books that he could draw upon, besides the real reference books, and besides the palaver of his own keenwitted friends. He had had it down to three unanswered questions when he applied for a shot at the Big What and Why. And now he had it down to one and one-half.

When Bill Sorel had come on the scene there had been three questions going around wearing blatantly false answers. These were: "What Makes it Thunder?" "What Makes a Baseball Curve?" "How Do the Pebbles Get Under the Eaves?" It is hard to believe the answers that had been given to these questions by scientists, some of them grown men.

Listen to this one:

"Thunder is produced when lightning heats the surrounding air and causes it to expand and send out waves. The expanding air is heard as thunder."

Well, what can you do when you come on something like that? Possibly it was better than answer that earlier generations gave, that the lightning burned up the air and the thunder was caused by new air rushing

in to fill up the place.

Well, Bill Sorel had found out what causes thunder. It was really a wonder that somebody else hadn't stumbled onto the right answer before he had. Read it. Read the amazingly evident answer in *The Child's Big What and Why Book*.

Listen to this about a baseball. And it's been repeated again and again for more than a century.

"The curving of a baseball is caused by denser air in the bottom of the baseball than on the top. Therefore the bottom spin will be more effective than the top spin, will have more traction on the air, and will cause the ball to curve. The ball will curve to the right if the pitcher throws it with a clockwise spin, and to the left if the spin is counterclockwise. Artillery shells behave according to the same rule."

Oh, great bloated bulls! What? A three-and-a-half inch difference in elevation would cause enough pressure difference between the top and the bottom of a baseball to make the thing curve up to eighteen inches in sixty-six feet? Where is your sense of proportion? Suppose the difference in elevation-pressure should be a hundred thousand times as much, the difference between low ground and the height of thirty thousand feet or so. Would the thrown ball then curve a hundred thousand times as much? Would it curve thirty miles off course in sixty-feet of travel? As Etta Mae would say, "It's kind of doubtful."

But now Bill Sorel halfway knew what made a baseball curve. He had heard the explanation at second hand. Today he hoped to hear it first hand.

And listen to this one about pebbles in the little rain worn ditches under the eaves of buildings:

"It is sometimes asked why there are usually small white pebble-stones under the eaves-drops of buildings when there do not seem to be any other pebbles around anywhere. But the answer is that there are always pebbles around everywhere. They are mixed with the great bulk of the earth and are not noticed. But rain washes the finer and ingliter earth particles away and leaves the pebbles behind. That is the reason that there seem to be so many pebbles under the eaves of buildings, particularly after a rain."

Aw, heel-flies! Bill Sorel didn't know the answer to that one, but he knew that such drivel wasn't the answer.

Yeah, he had a big red plum. He wasn't going to let it get away. He was going to make sure of it. He got in his Red Rang (a type of motor car) and drove off to find the man who could complete his half answer to the second question. And as he drove, he reviewed in his mind that momentous third question.

Some pebbles are limestone, but most of them are quartz. And there are not always pebbles around. In much earth there are no pebbles at all. In most earth, the true pebbles will make up less than one part in fifty thousand. Ah, but you put up a building or house and move into it, and after the very first rain there is a thick accumulation of pebbles in its eaves-drops. Has fifty thousand times their amount of earth been washed away to reveal them?

Bill Sorel had made a nuisance of himself around building projects in checking out the pebble situation. In one place he had taken a cubic yard of dirt, hauled it aside, and gone over it all with a toothbrush and sieve. And he had not found any pebbles at all. The only things too big to go through the sieve were organic things, roots, hickory nut hulls, twigs, pieces of bark and pieces of worms. There were not any natural pebbles at all. He kept track of all artificial pebbles (pieces of mortar, cinder block fragments, bits of limestone gravel and of flint chat). He would always know them from genuine pebbles, and he already know that they would not accumulate under eaves.

He continued his surveillance as the seven houses on this particular tract were raised, were finished, were first rained upon. He examined them. The rain had made little under-the-eaves ditches around all the houses, but there were no pebbles in those ditches. Something was missing from the formula. The premonition of what it might be excited Bill Sorel and almost scared him.

People moved into one of the houses, and Sorel waited impatiently for it to rain. But it didn't rain for a whole week. People moved into a second of the houses, and that night it rained. Sorel was around with a flashlight at dismal, drenching dawn (it was partly for such devoted labor as this that Sorel had won the big red plum), and he discovered that the two inhabited houses now had pebbles in their eaves-drop runners, and that the five uninhabited houses had none.

He followed it up. As soon as people moved into another house and there was rain thereafter, so soon was there a full complement of pebbles



around that house.

You do not believe this? Pick out a housing development in your own region, and make a nuisance of yourself by observing it closely. You will be convinced, unless you are of such mind-set as defies conviction.

Sorel observed other housing developments, apartment projects, commercial constructions. Wherever eaves-runnels were not precluded by roof guttering and spouting, there would be white pebbles appearing in full force as soon as the structure had been put to human use and it had rained thereafter.

Sorel tried it at his own nineteenth-floor apartment. He figured a way to divert rainfall from the roof. He made this diversion, and he made a little ledge outside his window on which the diverted rain might fall.

(A little misunderstanding was created by these activities of Sorel. Firemen and policemen and psychologists and deacons came and soft-talked him and tried to capture him with hooks and ropes and nets. They thought he was contemplating jumping off the building to his own destruction. He wasn't. There just wasn't any way to divert the rain-drop without climbing around on the outside of that building.)

Well, it rained the night after Sorel had made these arrangements. There sure had not been any pebbles there before it rained. There had been nothing there but a little ledge or trough made out of number two pine boards and fastened to the brickwork with screws and lead anchors.

It rained and rained, and Bill Sorel kept night watch on his little ledge by the lightning flashes and the diffused night light of the town. One moment there had not been any pebbles. And the next moment there had been a complete complement of pebbles. Sorel knew that the pebbles were for him. He knew they wouldn't have appeared on the ledge of an apartment that nobody lived in. but how had the pebbles got to that nineteenth-floor ledge? This was the question that still lacked even a hint of an answer.

Bill Sorel in his Red Ranger arrived at a little acreage and came on a tall middle-aged man who was eating round onions; and with him was a bright-faced little girl who was eating gingerbread.

"They're good for the circulation," the man said. "I bet I eat more onions than any man in the county. I'm George 'Cow-Path' Daylight. You sent me a postcard that you were coming to see me today."

"Yes," Bill Sorel said. "I'm told that you really know what makes a

baseball curve. I've been looking for the answer to that one for a long time."

"I'm Susie 'Corn-Flower' Daylight," the bright-faced little girl said. "Mr. Cow-Path here is my grandfather."

"Yes, I really know what makes a ball curve," Cow-Path said. "It's because I know what makes it curve that I've been striking out batters for thirty years. You ask the batters in Owasso and Coweta and Vedigris about me. You ask them in Oologah and Tiawah and Bushyhead. They'll tell you who keeps the Catoosa Mud-Cats on top of the heap year after year. I am the best small-town pitcher in northeast Oklahoma, and I'm the best because I know what makes a baseball curve."

"And I am the best third-grade girl pitcher in Catoosa," Susie Corn-Flower Daylight said. "I can even whizz them by most of those big girls in the fourth and fifth grades."

"Cow-Path, they tell me that you maintain that the direction of the spin has nothing to do with the direction of the curve of a ball. And you say that there isn't a gnat's leg's difference in the pressure on the top and the bottom of a ball."

"Not a millionth of a gnat's leg's difference," Cow-Path Daylight said. "A pitcher's mustache with one more hair on one side than on the other would have more effect on the ball than any such difference in pressure. The reason I understand the physics of the situation is that I spent two years in the sixth grade, which is why I learned that book General Science for The Primary Student so well. There was a paragraph in there about how a gyroscope top spins and loams and holds. I applied it to a baseball and became a great pitcher."

"Well, if the direction of the spin doesn't have any effect on the direction of the curve, what does have effect?" Sorel asked smoothly. He had heard the explanation at second hand, but he wanted to hear it from the master.

"The direction of the axis of the spin is what causes the curve," Cow-Path said, "but it doesn't matter which direction the ball spins on the axis. Look!"

Cow-Path Daylight took a pencil from Sorel's pocket and, with his strong fingers, he jabbed clear through one of those big round onions that he liked. He had it centered perfectly. He spun the pencil with its spitted onion, and that was the axis of spin. He moved the whole thing head-on

down the centerline of the hood of Sorel's Red Ranger, but with the direction of the axis about eleven degrees off to the right of the direction of movement.

"The curve will be in the direction of the angle of the axis of spin," Cow-Path said. "The ball, on the gyroscopic principle, tries to align its direction with the direction of the axis of spin. But the direction of the spin itself doesn't matter. See!"

Cow-Path showed, with the gyroscopic onion, how a ball would behave with the axis tilted to the right or the left, or up or down. And he showed that it was all the same thing whether the spin was clockwise or counterclockwise.

"It is for this understanding that I am known as the artist of the backup ball," Cow-Path said. "I can throw a fork-ball that moves like a slider, or a slider that moves like a fork-ball. And I can throw my floater and my drop with the same motion and the same direction of spin: only the tilt of the axis will be changed."

Sorel saw that all of this was true with an eternal verity. It was one of those big Copernican moments. Things could never again be as they had been before. Infinitesimally and particularly there had been made a contribution towards a new Heaven and a new Earth.

When he had his feelings a bit under control, Bill Sorel made small talk with the two Daylight people. Then, believing that their well of wisdom could not be exhausted even by such a huge cask as had been drawn from it, he asked them questions.

"Do you know what causes thunder?" he asked them.

"Do you mean thunder or the sound of thunder?" Susie Corn- Flower Daylight asked around her gingerbread. "They're two different things."

"I suppose I mean the sound of thunder," Sorel said. "Thunder itself has no cause."

"Why, how smart you are, for a city man!" Corn-Flower admired.

"I very nearly know what causes the sound of thunder, the sound of lightning really, but I don't know exactly," Cow-Path said. "Lightning is resinous, as we know from the color of it as well as from the odor. I believe that when lightning cracks or fractures the air, it coats both parts of the air with a sort of rosin dust — not too different from the rosin that pitchers use. Then, when the two parts of the air come together again immediately, they are a little bit offset from each other. So they grind and

set themselves together, and the two rosined surfaces rubbing together make a noise.”

Bill Sorel was amazed. Cow-Path’s explanation was gibberish, of course. But it sounded almost like the real explanation would sound if given in code, and it may have been just that. And Susie Corn-Flower’s divination that the thunder and the sound of thunder were two different entities was — well, it was a thunderous sort of intention. Sorel felt very pleased and gratified with these two persons.

So he tried them with the final question.

“How do pebbles get under the eaves of houses and buildings?” he asked.

“Oh, I suppose they come off the roof,” Cow-Path said. “The rain must loosen them, and then they roll off the roof into the eaves-drop ditch.”

“No, Grandpa, no,” Susie Corn-Flower Daylight said. “Why would they ever be on the roof to fall off? The pebble angel puts the pebbles directly into the eaves-drop ditch. He puts them there as a sign he is guarding that building and that everything is all right. Buildings without people living in them never have pebbles under the eaves.”

“No, I know they don’t, Corn-Flower,” Sorel said. “But did you ever hear that rotten people don’t have pebbles around their houses either?”

“I’ve never known any rotten people,” Susie Corn-Flower said. “We’ve never had any rotten people in our town.”

“That’s right. There never have been any here,” Cow-Path said.

Bill Sorel had The Child’s Big What and Why Book finished a week later — he was a fast worker — and it was ready to send off. But he had two versions of one page, and he had not yet made his selection between them. This was the page that covered the question, “How do the pebbles get under the eaves?”

Sorel went to the Wastrel’s Club to drink white rum and think about it. One version gave the old safe answer, that there are always pebbles around everywhere, and that the rain washed the dirt away from them and leaves the pebbles. This was the safe falsehood.

The other version was somewhat different. It was true, probably: or at least it was a coded statement of a truth. But could Sorel get away with a truth like that in the What and Why Book?

Etta Mae Southern was already in Wastrels’ with a handsome, rich, and goodhumored man. She made very small horizontal circles with her

finger in the air.

“That’s the world’s smallest record playing, ‘I wish it were you instead,’” she called across the club room.

And Mrs. Justex was already in Wastrels’. She was drinking one of those lacteal gin-sloshes that are called Milky Ways. So Mrs. Justex did drink milk, sometimes, and in a way. That fact changed just about everything. It meant that the widest of improbables was still possible.

On the wall of Wastrels’ was a paragraph of wisdom:

“When one has discarded all absolutely impossible explanations of a thing, then what is left, however improbable it seems, must be accepted as the explanation until a better explanation comes along.”

Bill Sorel had seen that paragraph on the wall a dozen times, but it had never hit him between the ears before.

A cop came into Wastrels’ and said it had started to rain outside. He had a Salty Dog. Cops are the only people left in the world who still drink them.

“You will be in my apartment in fifteen minutes,” Bill Sorel said.

“Why will I be?” the cop asked him.

“To try to make me stop hitting people on their heads with pebble-stones,” Sorel said. And Sorel left Wastrels’ and went to his apartment. He selected one of the two versions of the disputed pages and put it with the rest of the pages. He sealed and stapled the completed What and Why, and went out and down in the elevator and out into the rain to mail the thing in the stand-up mailbox on the corner. And then he came back to his apartment with happy anticipation.

Then he was standing at his opened window in the early dark. it was raining and blowing and getting him pretty wet. He was scooping up handfuls, double-handfuls of pebbles from the ledge under his window and flinging them out at the lower world. He scooped out twenty, thirty, fifty handfuls of pebbles from that little ledge-trough that wouldn’t hold three handfuls at one time. But now that trough stood full of pebble-stones no matter how many he scooped out of it.

Somebody was banging at Sorel’s apartment door, and he let him bang. And pretty soon somebody was shaking Sorel’s shoulder, and he let him shake.

“Hey, you got to quit throwing pebbles down there,” the cop was saying. “You’re hitting people that are trying to get taxis in the rain, and

you're tearing their umbrellas. Those are bigger pebble-stones than you usually throw, aren't they?"

"These are the biggest ever," Sorel said happily. "These are prime pebbles. Say, I used the page about the pebble angel in the book. That's going to hit a lot of people crossways. I mailed the whole thing off with that in it. I'm glad I did."

"They come in just as fast as you throw them out, don't they?" the cop said. "I wonder where they come from? I never noticed that that's the way pebbles come when it rains. Can't you throw more of them faster and get ahead of them?"

Oh, it was with a wonderful clatter that the pebbles arrived!

"Man, this is as fast as I can throw them," Sorel panted. "I bet I've thrown a thousand pounds of them down already. It sure is fun. It looks like I made a breakthrough in pebbles. The pebble angel is showing that he likes the mention."

"Maybe if we both scooped them and threw them as fast as we could, we could almost keep up with them," the cop said. "Yeah, it is fun." The cop threw lefthanded, and the two fitted well together at the window.

He was a good person, that cop. There weren't any rotten people around there. (But have you looked under your eaves after a rain?)

## QUIZ SHIP LOOSE

There were five persons on Quiz Ship. The ship's interior is shown as a functional lounge and wardroom, with food center, game center, navigation center, and problem and project center. There are three doors in the back bulkhead of this functional lounge: the triangle-sign door of the Crag, the circle-sign door of the Bloods, and the square-sign door of Questor Shannon. At back left is the "Instant Chute."

The five persons are Manbreaker and Bodicea Crag with the power of their earthiness (of whatever earth they are down on); George and Jingo Blood with their "movement-as-power"; and, Questor Shannon, a slight man who expresses an oceanic massiveness and depth. Four of these people seem completely relaxed, but one of them, Questor Shannon, does not.

"Each time we go into an adventure, we go relaxed," Questor was saying. "Some day we're going to get -meared when going in so relaxed. I feel we should go tensed on this one"

"Relax, Questor," the other four said, as they said so often.

"This is an easy one," Bodicea Crag (Queen Bodicea) gave the relaxed opinion. "Paledor World has no reputation for danger. Two other parties have been here, and they have left it unscathed."

"The logs of both parties show them to have been a bit scathed," Questor still argued. "Persons of both those parties have sworn that Paledor is a murderous world behind its smiling and open face. And their own words have been contradictory. The most open of all the worlds: one of them said. Well, why does it remain a closed world then? What has been the obstacle? Why have we come here to solve, in relaxed fashion, an enigma that some have called murderous? Coming to any other world that has been called murderous, even in minority report, we would come with much greater caution."

"Murderous it does not seem to be," Manbreaker Crag spoke with assurance. "No one of either previous party was killed. Well, yes, it is a puzzle. I like puzzles. The John Chancel Party — Chancel was always essentially a one-man party, but he did have three companions with him here — recorded that Paledor World was an absolute puzzle, that they did not know what they had seen after they had seen it, that they did not remember what they had been told after it had been explained to them.

Chancel was good at puzzles, but he did not solve the puzzle here. He said that this world had the most advanced technology of any world known, so advanced that the world seemed to deprecate it a bit and keep it in the background”

“I know what Chancel wrote in his ship’s log,” Questor said tensely. “‘It has a rich hoard,’ he wrote. ‘Like every hoard, it is guarded by a sleeping dragon. Unlike most cases, this is a corporate dragon. And unlike other corporate dragons, this one has a sting in its tail. It can murder you with that sting.’ So there is something to this puzzle to be tense about.”

“Chancel filled his log books with riddles and with enigmatic statements,” Jingo Blood (the Empress Jingo) said. “But he didn’t solve this riddle. I will.”

“How will you solve what John Chancel couldn’t. Jingo?” Questor asked. “How will you figure out what Vitus Ambler misfigured? What special attributes do you have for this?”

“I’m smarter than they were,” Jingo Blood said. “Relax, Questor.”

“But we shoot in just nine seconds”

“So, relax for nine seconds, then,” Jingo told him.

The nine-second interval ran its course. The five persons shot into the “Instant Chute” at back left. The Quiz Ship went into a “blank-out hover.”

The “Instant Chute” was itself a piece of very advanced technology. Much of the technology of Gaea — also known as Eretz or Earth — was quite advanced. The chute brought the five Quiz Ship persons down through ten thousand meters of space instantly, and it set them onto Paleder World. The requirements set into the chute in this case were simple: “That the persons be brought down within Paleder City, on solid footing, in an outdoor place near or at the nexus of the most intense intellectual activity of the city.” Well any sufficiently sophisticated “Chute” could do that.

They landed without a jolt. But did they come down safely?

“This is wrong, abysmally , wrong!” Questor croaked fearfully as he came to ground in totally unacceptable surroundings. “There is not supposed to be any such jungle or miasma as this in Paleder City. We have overview pictures. It is not supposed to be like this. Something is very wrong.” He beat what seemed to be a fanged bird away from his face. And these were not acceptable surroundings. No one could dream of



worse.

“There sure are not supposed to be any fer-de-lance snakes like that one!” Manbreaker Crag barked, “not in the middle of the leading city of one of the most civilized planets ever reported.” He flipped his swagger stick into a bolo or machete. “We have landed solidly, but barely so.. This is quicksand all around us, and all the poisonous-looking flora are floating plants on that quicksand. Ah. look at the jag-rocks protruding from the quagmire! And there is a jag-toothed monster perched on every one of those rocks or snags. A person would lose a hand or an arm if he reached for anything to keep from sinking in this bog. What went wrong with our landing anyhow? Is this even Paleder World at all? The Chute has goofed. But there cannot be any such outrageous malfunction as this!”

“It isn’t my idea of beautiful downtown Paleder City either,” George Blood growled. “There hasn’t been such a miasmal landscape anywhere since the Devonian period on Caea. And we were exactly over central Paleder City. Neither the Chancel nor the Ambler expeditions mentioned anything like this, and there are no such extensive, endless, I might say, areas of desolation in our photographs, the rougher sections of this world, certainly not in Paleder City. This is a very sticky malfunction. Let’s back out of it. Let’s go back and do it again.”

“Let’s go back and not do it again,” Bodicea Crag said. “Let’s not do it again till we find out what went with our Chute. This is deplorable.”

The firm land “island” that they were on was hardly big enough for the five of them to stand on even with extreme crowding; and the snouts and serrate mouths that broke the surface of the quicksand were murderous. The whole thing was a churning soup-bowl of death-dealing monsters.

“The best place to attack a problem is where it is,” Jingo stated firmly. “It may be that we have been handed, quite by accident, entree into the underlying mystery and puzzle of Paleder. Hey, this is a puzzle that can really get its teeth into you! That was new boot too! Let’s attack the puzzle where it sprawls about us here. I do not believe that the Chute malfunctioned at all, but some phrase of our instructions to it may have led it to give us this unusual opportunity. Let’s use it, let’s use it! How real is this, Questor? There will never be a better time to test the latest of the latest, the new portable instrument. What does the gadget say?”

Questor Shannon had the small reference instrument out and in the

palm of his hand. It read “fact and depth and intensity of illusion” But immediately, a sleek head on a long neck came out of the quicksand, gobbled the reference instrument, took three of Questor’s fingers and a part of the palm of his hand with it, and withdrew into the quagmire again. It had a neat and precise operation for something so large, for that head could have taken Questor himself entire in one gulp. And Shannon sniffled and whimpered and shook with the pain of it.

“Ah, reality, along with the reality discerner, has been swallowed by a swamp dragon,” Jingo Blood said. “So now, reality is to be found in the dragons and not in ourselves. We can use your lost fingers for a reality meter now though, Questor. If you find that your fingers are back on your hand, after a bit, that will mean that the present scene is a little less than real. But, if the fingers stay gone, that means .that points are scored against all of us.”

Jingo Blood seemed to be enjoying the situation a bit more than the other four were, but she was surely not leaping with joy about it. They couldn’t move from there without being done to death by the huge and slashing creatures. And they couldn’t stay there very long, as their “island” was beginning to crumble under them.

“At the present moment, there is no sun in the sky over Paleder World,” George Blood remarked in what was supposed to be an even-toned conversational voice. “And yet it was at Paleder City noon that we shot the Chute and came down. The sky should now be full of the Sun Proxima (the Grian Sun) which is also the sun of Kentauron-Mikron, Camiroi, and Astrobe. Why, by the way, have the people of those three worlds not sufficiently explored Paleder, or Dahae as some of them call it? Why have not the inhabitants of the planets of Sun Alpha and Sun Beta explored it? A mystery. There is no sun in the sky over us, and yet there is sufficient shocking gray and orange, lurid and garish light. No sun, and no real cloud-cover either. Dull daytime stars are above us; but instead of clouds there are globs of gloop drifting in the very low air. And one of them is coming upon us now at an unnatural speed.”

The glob came upon them and swallowed them in its fetid breath. It was sharp with teeth in it, and these were quickly identified as belonging to aerial snakes. The glob brought with it a saturating mental and emotional depressions stark consternation, an unbearable fearfulness and unpleasantness. It brought dread. It brought hallucination and

contradiction, fear of falling, and fear of ultimate fire. It brought ravening ghosts and ghost-animals. It brought flying foxes that fastened onto throats with hollow and life-draining teeth. It brought violent small creatures who sometimes seemed to be human children and sometimes tearing monsters.

But a voice came from one of the small and possibly human monsters. It was a boy's voice speaking in Demotic or Low Galactic:

“Hang in there, Gaea guys! Some of us are on your side. Don't let this whip you. It's only a little psychic storm.”

What sort of stuff was that?

And then came the abomination of total despair. This corroding despair entered into the organs and entrails of all the Quiz Ship people. It entered the streets and alleys of their brains and the avenues of their notochords. It entered all the bags and vessels of their bodies. It suffused their glands and seeped into the marrow interiors of their hollow bones. This was complete despair.

“If this is not the ultimate damnation, then I'd gladly choose the ultimate damnation in place of it,” Bodicea Crag gave a sharp-voiced value judgment. “Whatever we are in, it cannot get any worse than this.”

It got worse suddenly. The “island” they were crowded onto, the island in the midst of the endless quicksand-quagmire, erupted and cast them all into the noisome and poisonous morass.

They were struck and gobbled and slashed. They were torn apart by tides and concussions. They were drowning in hot, searing, vividly inhabited and attacking mud; and they had limbs lopped off by swamp dragons. They screamed, and their screams were choked off in mouths full of mud.

“I'm not a cowardly man,” the huge and pompous Manbreaker Crag sounded then, managing to get his mouth, but nothing else, above the surface of the erupting and devouring mud, “but we have to make our peril known to somebody, somewhere. Loudness is called for, and my own loudest voice is rather unpleasant and piercing.”

It was indeed. But everything else that remained in that world was likewise unpleasant and piercing. All of the persons of this expedition had, under test conditions, endured as much as fourteen megapangs of pain. They could not have qualified for the expedition otherwise. But here, in the ravening bog, there was multitudinous pain dozens of times more

intense, and there was no way they could endure it.

But how does one not endure things that are at the same time beyond endurance and beyond escape? The five screamed, screamed with their mouths and their eyes full of blood and mud and offa1. They were being eviscerated by dragons, and they were being boiled alive like lobsters. Things were literally eating the brains in their heads and the organs in their bodies. Things had already devoured their minds and their souls.

The five of them screamed, underwater and under mud, mindlessly and soullessly, on and on.

“Oh, stop that exasperating shrilling,” adult voices were saying to them in High Galactic. “And stand up! And stop fouling yourselves in the mud! Are all the people where you come from as frivolous and silly as you are?”

The five persons from Quiz Ship stood up. There was something about the silliness of their situation that was almost more horrible than the pain they had thought they were suffering.

They were standing somewhat less than ankle-deep in little puddles of tacky mud. They stepped out of it and tried to cleanse themselves of flecks and spots of mire. There really wasn't too much of it on them. They were smeared somewhat, but they weren't mortally dirty.

“We were in a horrible quagmire-jungle,” Questor Shannon was saying. He felt they owed some sort of explanation to someone. “We were overwhelmed with despondency, and we were being killed by swamp-dragons and fire snakes and frenzied foxes. We were in the abomination of total despair.”

But it was plain that these people didn't believe him at all.

“You were where you are now,” one of those Paleder adults said. “We are sorry if we fail your expectations, but we do not have any swamp-dragons or frenzied foxes on our world. You landed in this little spot where you are now. This was less than a minute ago. Then you began to scream and carry on.”

“What? What is — what was this place?” Jingo Blood was asking. “What a double-dealing monstrosity of a place it was? And where has it gone?”

“It was, and is, as even you should be able to see, a very small amusement park for very small children; one of those adults said. “As you can see, it is no more than twenty meters across, and nowhere is the

growth, the 'jungle' as you call it, more than one meter high."

That was true. The fearful flora did not now come to the waists of any of the Quiz Ship people; but, just a moment ago, it had seemed to reach all the way to the sunless sky, sunless no more.

For the Grian Sun was strong in the noontime sky now. What, it had been less than a minute since the Quiz Ship people had landed? All that confusion had taken place in less than a minute?

"The snakes, the dragons, the sea-serpents, the air-serpents, the flying devil foxes —" Bodicea Crag was pleading as though for justification.

"Oh, you mean the little rubber creatures," one of the Paleder adults said. "The small children like to make them and to play with them. And they make jangles of noises when they play here, but not so discordant noises as you yourselves make. Do you like to play with the little rubber animals also? Perhaps you will be allowed to make some of them. The small children have dragon-making contests, but these are the failed constructions that you find here. The children. Ugh, the children! They are tedious when they are uncontrolled. Where are the adults of your own party?"

"We are the adults. We are all the party there is," Manbreaker Crag affirmed, with a touch of sad arrogance.

"You-are-the-adults?" the Paleder people asked in apparent disbelief. "The way you were carrying on, we thought that you were simply incredibly loutish children. Now we see that you are, yes, that you are incredibly loutish adults. We will have to take you into custody and to inquire into your awkward arrival here. Yes, and into your grotesque behavior, We are not sure that you are genuine humans or Proto-humans at all. You may be what are called 'fiasco humans'. It is likely that you are from Gaea or one of the other very backward worlds."

"It's only one-upmanship," Jingo Blood tried to rationalize it to her companions as the five of them were led away (by moral force, not physical), apparently to some sort of confinement. "The people of Paleder, seem to be very good at one-upmanship. But I do not quite understand —"

"We haven't made a very impressive beginning here," Manbreaker Crag said dismally, and they silently all agreed with him. But how had they seemed to be drowning and dymg? How had they been doing it in little patches of mud that were no more than five centimeters deep? How

had it seemed that they were being broken apart and eaten alive by ravening animals that now turned out to be no bigger than their thumbs, and that moreover were made out of rubber?

“How are your fingers, Questor?” Jingo Blood asked him.

“They hurt terribly,” he said, and he showed them.

“Ah, but you still have them,” Jingo chortled. “That means that the little scene we just experienced was not real and that it didn’t happen”

“Those fingers, they are bad,” George Blood said. “They’re highly infected already. I suspect that they will have to come off. And if you do lose them, that might mean that the little scene we just experienced was real to some extent, and it did happen, a little bit anyhow.”

“Loss of nerve, and loss of our sense of propotion, that’s what has been responsible for our fiasco,” Manbreaker Crag was rationalizing to his fellow Quiz Ship people. “We let them get the jump on us, and make fools of us.”

“Being made a fool of shouldn’t matter a lot to an explorer,” Jingo Blood told them. “The job of an explorer is to solve problems and to get information. The explorer must be willing to serve as bait if there is no other way to coax the information to strike. Special information is like lightning, and it must be tempted. So, we have been bait. Yeah, live bait.”

“It hadn’t seemed like a loss of proportion to me,” George Blood said. “Maybe it is a finding of a lost sense of propotion on this problem. We lost our sense of proportion as to Paleder World one hundred years ago, when John Chancel first set down here. And no one from our world has been able to see this world in proper proportion from that day till this. Why have we been confused? This isn’t an alien planet. This is a world of human or proto-human persons. It is a civilized world where they speak Galactic. “But there are so many enormities to be solved here! There are so many towering questions to be answered, and none of our people has even had the wit to ask them yet. Why is Palederpermitted to hide its light? That is the question.”

“How have the people of Paleder become such master illusionists? That is the main question,” Manbreaker Crag stated pompously.

“No, that is not the question at all,” Jingo contradicted. “I don’t believe that the head of the creature even know that there are illusions going on. Those things are part of the snap of its tail. But what is the creature itself like if its tail has such a snap to it? That is more like the

question. The things to notice aren't the little diversions such as the tiny park that seemed to us to be enormous. What are we being diverted from? That is the question.

There must have been many people diverted away from raiding the wonderful technology of Paleder. The people of Paleder seem to set up the illusion that their technology is not worth bothering with. How have they managed that illusion? That is much more important than the little tail-flick illusion of the quagmire and its dragons."

They were in a pleasant enough room, large and probably comfortable. They hadn't explored it thoroughly yet, but they had learned one objectionable thing about it: they couldn't get out of it. They couldn't open the doors. They couldn't even find the doors.

"If we are not to mind being fools, then let's take the fools' way of getting some action here!" Manbreaker shouted. "Let's make a noise about it."

"You make a noise about it, Manbreaker," Bodicea said. "You have a peculiar talent for that."

Manbreaker Crag made howling, roaring, gibbering noises of fearful volume. Possibly he did it for no longer than a quarter of a minute, but it seemed like hours to his four companions. What did it seem like to the Paleder people?

"Simpletons from Gaea, stop that childish racket!" Paleder voices sounded the command to the them from outside the room.

"We want out of here!" Manbreaker roared. "Out, out, out!"

"Come out then" said the voices with perhaps a touch of taunting. "The doors aren't locked."

"We don't even now what are doors and what aren't," George Blood howled.

"Intelligent persons would know doors," the voices outside remarked. "The doors can be found by persons with eyes in their heads. They are not locked. They are only intelligence coded. Persons of adequate intelligence can open them easily. Persons with inadequate intelligence better remain where they are for a while. We will possibly have to locate your keepers and have them come and get you."

"Oh, there s no problem about getting out," Jingo Blood told her companions after a moment. "You can get us out of here, Manbreaker. You can get us of here by another very peculiar talent that you have. But

let us first take the blinders off our eyes, now that they are loosened. Let us consider why the Paleder affair has not been properly pursued.

“Why have we people of Gaea not pursued it? Paleder is a gleaming ‘goldmine in the sky’ with its technology that is beyond any other. But this is only our third acknowledged attempt at it, the other two being one hundred years ago for one of them, and fifty years ago for the other. No, our own is not an acknowledged attempt either, so there have been only two of them. But there may have been several sneaky Pete attempts like our own. And why have the people of the nearer worlds, Camiroi, Astrobe, Kentaaron-Mikron, not pursued it? Probably they have, but somehow they were shaken from it or diverted from it.

“Does Paleder really have the most advanced and most sophisticated technology of all the worlds? Likely it has. Then why hasn’t that technology been appropriated? Or why haven’t there been attempts, with or without force, to appropriate it? Is it the case of ‘Yes, it is the most sophisticated technology to be found anywhere; only —’ Well, only what? What is it that turns people away from the acquisition, from the follow-up? Is there something phony about this ‘most advanced technology anywhere’? Is there something undesirable about it? That is what we have to find out. Now let us get out of here and find it out Lead us out of here, Manbreaker.”

“How?” the ponderous Manbreaker asked.

“By one of the small number of talents that you have. No, not by roaring, by your other main talent.”

“Oh, that one!” Manbreaker barked. He was a large and powerful man.

“You can tell the doors, Manbreaker,” Bodicea said. “They will be the easiest parts to break open.”

Manbreaker Crag broke out of that room, presumably through a door where it should have been the easiest. And the other Quiz Ship people followed him out.

“How novel,” said a Paleder person with the only touch of amusement ever noticed in any of those high-brained ones. “We ourselves would never have thought of that solution. And yet it conforms to the requirements, as being an alternate intelligent solution, a solving of the egress problem by using a more spacious interpretation of the framework of the problem. We might be tempted to incorporate such a procedure



into our own thinking, were we not beyond the stage of incorporating any new material.”

“Certainly we allow visitors to Paleder World,” a Paleder person was saying in answer to a question. “Being the most open of all worlds, by our own claim and covenant, we could hardly bar visitors. No, we do not encourage them to come. Why should we? Visitors are always something of a nuisance. Yes, there have been many parties here from various worlds. No, you are not the third party to arrive here from Gaea. You are more like the thirtieth. Oh, we suppose it’s true that the parties who come here on ‘unacknowledged’ attempts, those who do not file ‘Paleder’ as their flight destination, do not often return from Paleder, or do not return in good case. Often they have bad luck in leaving. Those who come without filing flight patterns usually have a bit of theft in their hearts, and they must expect retribution. We find that you yourselves have not filed ‘Paleder’ as your destination. That was thoughtless of you.”

The people from Quiz Ship were on Paleder for part of three days. They held conversations with several dozens of the Paleder people in that time. Or else they held several dozen different conversations with a smaller number of these people. Why were the people of Paleder, those people of most surpassing accomplishments, of such undistinguished presence and appearance? Thirty seconds after speaking to one, you would remember only most vaguely what he looked like.

And certainly the science and technology of Paleder was unutterably advanced. Why then did it seem so trivial? Why were the Quiz Ship people so unamazed by it?

Take the weather. One could turn the “manual over-ride” on the weather box at any Paleder City street corner, and the indicated weather would happen at once. One could turn it to “rain,” and it would rain instantly. One could turn it to “rain harder” and it would rain harder. But the visitors from Gaea were made to feel that there was something gauche about using the “manual overrides” on everything. The programmed, automatic way of everything was the best. The “manual overrides” were there only in case of error in the automatic. But there were no errors.

“After all, we do have perfect weather,” a Paleder person said. “Perfect weather is weather that is not noticed at all. Perfection is anything that passes absolutely without notice.”

“I must disagree with that,” Questor Shannon argued. “Perfect

weather is that of which one might say ‘Ah, this is a beautiful day!’. I can find no fault at all with your controlled and flawless weather of Paleder; but I am not impelled to cry out ‘This is a beautiful day!’. I wonder why I’m not?”

There was the “hand-of-death” feeling on all things on Paleder. How to explain it? It was as if the people of Paleder had simply decided to stop living, their problems all being solved. And this decision to stop living was reflected in all their handiwork. Dead man stuff, yes. Puzzling.

“Both the impulse and the expression seem a little bit sticky to me,” the Paleder person said in answer to Questor’s “This is a beautiful day” thesis. “I am glad that our flawless weather does not provoke such jejune outbursts.”

Everything on Paleder was flawless. But was that the same thing as being perfect? Maybe. Was it the same thing as being excellent? Maybe. But there were surely some things that it was not. Perhaps it was not inspiring.

There was no impulse to revel in the flawlessness of things here on Paleder. Why then, on Gaea or most other worlds, was there often the impulse to revel and to hold high celebration for things that were hardly half this good?

The persons of Paleder traveled hardly at all. And this seemed unappreciative of them, since they could travel as much as they wanted, as far as they liked, as comfortably and as instantly as they wanted; and they could do it at no cost at all.

“Your ‘Travel Tricks’ are something on the line of our ‘Instant Chutes’, farther up on the same line,” Bodicea Crag was saying to a Paleder adult. “And yours are, yes, flawless. Our device uses a staggering amount of power to transport just five of us only ten thousand meters in an instant. But a million times as many of you could go a million times that far with the consumption of hardly any energy. I notice though that you do not use (I get the impression that you have the feature but no longer employ it) the ‘particular-excellence’ factor in selecting destinations. For instance, we instructed our ‘Instant Chute’ to set us down at the ‘nexus of the most intense intellectual activity’ of this city. As it happened, the chute goofed and set us down we know not where. It failed or misunderstood, but, usually it succeeds with pleasant results. Now, you could have yourselves transported to ‘the most pleasurable site and

circumstance of this world, at this moment' You could always have the best of the best. Why don't you?"

"We do, but not by selection. To do that, we would have to accept the view that one thing is ever more pleasurable than another, that one thing is ever better than another. We don't accept that."

"You don't?" Jingo Blood asked in amazement. "But things have to be better or worse than others. Such differences are what makes the world go around."

"Not this world," the Paleder person said.

"You amaze me," Jingo pursued it. "Don't you believe that one thing may, be more interesting another, that one person may be wittier than another, that one hill may be higher than another, that one song may be more musical than another?"

"No, no," the Paleder person said. "We believed and acted on these things on our way up. But when we got, to the top, we saw it all more clearly, so we did away with the top. All these apparent differences are mere illusions, to be cast aside."

"Well, dammit, don't you, master illusionists that you are, believe that one illusion may be more illusory than another?" George Blood demanded in full voice.

"No, no," the person said. "We don't accept illusion even about illusions. On Paleder World, one hill may not be higher than another. We no longer have any hills or mountains. They caused elements of randomness in our world, so we did away with them."

"Did you really level your hills and mountains?" Questor asked in amazement.

"No, of course we didn't. That is to look at it backwards. We raised our plains. Everything on Paleder is at highest point. 'Highest and most equal' is our motto," the Paleder person said.

Food on Paleder was, well, flawless. And it was always locally sufficient. But would you ever cry out, in the midst of devouring some of it, "Hey, this is good!"? Well, why wouldn't you?

Most of the consummate technology of Paleder was invisible. And, according to the Paleder persons, this general invisibility of unnoticeability was the sure sign of perfection. It is only imperfect things that draw attention to themselves.

"How does that tail belong to this animal?" Jingo Blood wailed in

sudden frustration early on their last day there. “What is the atrocious imbalance here all about anyhow?”

“My modified love, what are you talking about?” George Blood asked her.

“These citizens of Paleder, these possessors of the highest sophistry and equipment, they are a bunch of sleep-walkers! There is just no other word for them. What sort of animal is Paleder anyhow?”

“As you imply, jingo, it is the animal whose tail is its most interesting part,” George Blood said.

By the “tail” of Paleder, the Quiz Ship people seemed to mean the weird children of that world. Oh, the strange children of Paleder, lurking and flickering and burning, and seldom to be seen straight off!

“These people have their world set up so that no one is permitted to be too cold or too hot” Jingo puzzled, “or too wet or too dry; so that no one is allowed to be hungry or in bad health; where no one — this curdles me — is allowed to be unhappy. No one is permitted to be worried or uneasy, or ill-clad or unintelligent. Isn’t that exciting? No, it isn’t. But why isn’t it?”

“Well, these people here will answer us anything we ask,” Bodicea said. “Let’s ask them more questions then. Yeah, and come to more dead ends.”

“With us, of course, there is no division between our psychology and our technology,” was the answer that one of the Paleder persons gave to an awkwardly-asked question. “You cannot have our technology without also having our psychology. You cannot have our attainments without being like us. Ours is not a technology for,conscious persons”

“It is not a technology for whom?” Manbreaker crackled. But the High Galactic word which the person used, “syneidos,” “conscious,” was unmistakable.

“The ‘dragons’ with us as with you, though you may not understand it of your own cultus, the ‘dragons’ are no more than aspects or alternate morpha of our own children. oh, yes, they are often the murderous aspects of our children. They are often solidly, though unnaturally, fleshed dragons. And they can be mean! The dragon and the child are always one. But the child, given a little timi time, will usually outgrow its dragon. Or, less frequently, the dragon will outgrow its child and will then become the viable form”

That is what another Paleder person said in answer to another

awkwardly-phrased question from one of the Quiz Ship people. But the kid- dragons on Paleder were more often visible than Gaea.

“You say that we should control our children better? You say that our children should all be in bed by this hour of night? People of Gaea, we do control them, they are all in bed right now. I will wager that every child in Paleder City has been in his bed for two hours already tonight,” said another Paleder person in answer to another set questions. “Ah, but you ask who then are those small and savage persons or creatures congregating murderously in the small parks and stalking so devilishly through the darkened streets? Oh, those are our same children, sleeping in their beds in one of their aspects, and ravening in the tangled night in another. Small children often have more than one aspect to them”

“I thought Questor said lamely, “that the ‘dragons’ were really only small rubber devices made by the children”

“There are many ways of looking at it. The little rubber dragons or monsters are entry points for most of them. They pass through them. They are the talismans or triggers. They are their conceptions of how they will look. And then they become those conceptions for a while.”

“The reason we get such wraithy answers is that we ask all the wrong questions,” Jingo Blood complained to her companions. “Well, on the one end we can only fight dragons with dragons. And on the other end we canonry seek the right questions to ask.”

So they set up “Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon.” They implemented it with what talent of that sort they could discover in themselves. And they found that talent to be quite abundant, once it started to flow.

And they asked more, and still more awkward, questions. But it was Bodicea Crag (Queen Bodicea) who finally asked the key question.

“Are you people conscious?” she asked a group of Paleder people, and she was amazed at herself for asking it.

“No, of course not,” one of those person said. “We are entirely too civilized for that. Consciousness is a short and awkward interval that many persons and many races pass through. Other persons and races, less fortunate than these, remain in the state of consciousness and do not pass through it. Another group, ourselves, are now able to avoid consciousness entirely in our adult forms. Centuries ago, we passed through it, as a race, We still pass through it as small children. But there is

no reason for us to repeat that passage in our adult forms.”

“If you are not conscious, then you are — unconscious,” Jingo Blood said as if pronouncing a great truth.

“That is the silliest attempt at logic that I have ever heard” a Paleder person said. “But how can we explain her silliness to a completely silly person? We are not conscious. We are not unconscious. We are post-conscious. And ours is a post-conscious world.”

“If you are post-conscious, then you are not conscious that you are here talking to us” George Blood said. “You don’t know that you are here. You don’t know that we are here.”

“No, we’re not conscious of these things. We don’t know that we’re talking to you. But there’s a ‘pattern’ on our world that responds to you correctly, through us, or in other ways. That saves us trouble.”

“If you don’t know that we’re here, then we can insult you with impunity,” Manbreaker Crag said with a big grin on his big face.

“You can try it,” one of the Paleder persons said. “But our ‘pattern’ may react to your insults, either through ourselves or otherwise. When our ‘patern’ reacts, you can get hurt badly.”

“Then all your vaunted technolog will serve only post-conscious persons,” Questor Shannon said.

“Yes, our flawless technology will serve only flawless persons — ourselves.”

“Then you are no more than zombies!” Manbreaker chortled.

“No, we went through the zombie phase, in our race, a little while after we went through the conscious phase. But now we are post-zombie as as post-conscious. Really, now that we have arrived at our destination, we don’t much care to remember the roads by which we arrived.”

“Will you prevent, or try to prevent, our leaving Paleder World?” George Blood asked.

“No, we will not,” one of those post-conscious persons answered. “But something may try to vent your leaving, perhaps the ‘pattern,’ perhaps the dragon-children.”

The Quiz Ship persons withdrew from the post-conscious aggregation. It was late at night of the last (but they did not know that it would be the last) night of their visit to Paleder World.

“There’s a psychological imbalance in all this,” Jingo Blood said. “Becoming post-conscious is going to have a devastating kick-back

through the whole psychic web. It has to be counter-balanced somewhere. What is it that must proceed from such an imbalance?"

"Nothing will proceed from it," George Blood said. "The kick will be a backward one. Nothing will follow. But, oh, what will go before! The seemly adults will throw it all back onto the childhood. The dragon-children are not post-conscious. They are conscious, and murderously pre-conscious. All the psychic lumber cast off by their fastidious parents comes clattering down upon them. It has to land on someone. What power, what twisted power those kids must have!"

So the Quiz Ship people concentrated all their energies on "Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon"

"Our 'Instant Chute' did not fail or misunderstand when we came down here," Jingo said now. "The little quagmire park that seemed so large to us, it really was the nexus of the most intellectual activity in town. Wherever the morphic children are concentrating in their psychic monsterness, that will be the nexus of what intellectual activity there is here. Everywhere else, things are post-intense and post intellectual and post-active."

"Yes," George Blood agreed.

"They got rid of such a lot of clutter when they became post-people," Jingo went on, "and it all comes down upon their children."

"We have the picture now," Manbreaker blasted with his strong voice. "All their brains are in their tail now, and the tail has a murderous flick to it. Let's take the Chute and get to Quiz Ship as soon as possible. And let us get away from this world, The Chancel party got away. The Ambler party got away. A lot of the others must have failed. Let's make a break for it."

"We can try," Bodicea said. "Maybe we can get the ship loose."

"The midnight town was lively. And post-people do not usually indulge in night life very much. What was reveling through the town tonight were great numbers of monsters and dragons, and those small creatures who seemed to be human children and also to be tearing monsters. Fanged kids, poisonous kids, mean kids. Aye, and the damnable aspects of them!

Roving ghosts and ghost-animals. Flying foxes attacking with hollow, blood-sucking teeth. Swamp dragons. A sleek head on a very long neck came out of the slimy darkness and took three of Questor's fingers and part of the palm of his hand. This was the same flesh and bone that he

had lost on their arrival. And Questor Shannon sniffled and whimpered and shook with the pain of it.

“The untinkable calm of the post-persons must be paid for in some more jittery coin,” a pleasant dragon said. “It is paid for, or recompense is made for it, by this delirious chaos here in the undermind of this world. It is the children who compose the undermind now, and their creatures, and their creatures’ creatures. It is the howling irrationality.”

“Dragon,” George Blood spoke dangerously, “you speak with my wife’s voice. Have you devoured my wife?”

“Oh, it’s myself, George,” the dragon said in the voice of Jingo Blood. “The dragon and I are one. It’s part of the ‘Project Fight-Dragon-With-Dragon,’ but it’s a difficult projection when it’s done consciously rather than unconsciously. I suspected, while I was still an undergraduate in psychology, that children of our own world were sometimes able to incarnate their dragons, but those one-in-ten-thousand cases of it were always explained away as something else. I can’t do it very well yet. I notice that Bodicea is doing it a little better, but not really well. And you other three are total busts.

“Oh, by the Great Clamminess, here comes that Glowering Glob again!”

It was much as it had been during that first minute after their arrival. The glob of clammy gloop, drafting in the low air, came upon them and swallowed them whole with its fetid breath. There were aerial snakes in that glob, and they struck out of it with paralyzing pain. There was the saturation of mental and emotional depression, the stark consternation and unbearably fearful and contradictory. There was the dread. There was the fear of falling forever.

“No, no, no, no, I cannot go through this again,” Manbreaker Crag yowled.

“Is it the end of it all, the dirty end of it,” George Blood roared.

There were fer-de-lance snakes. There were swamp-dragons and jag-toothed monsters.

“I do hate a dragged-out death,” Jingo keened as her dragonness slipped away from her. “Come quickly, end of it! oh, come quickly!”

“Be of stout hearts, Gaea guys, a little giffing dragon cried in a clear and boyish voice. “Some of us are with you. We’re on your side.”

They had heard that voice before.



But the Gaea people were being struck and gobbled and slashed. They were drowning in hot, searing, vividly inhabited and attacking mud.

“I’m Glic,” the clear, boyish voice sounded again. “I’m pleased to meet all of you.”

“Oh Lord,” Manbreaker moaned. “Is it the amenities that we meet again in this our final passion?”

“Voice of Glic, how did the people of the Chancel Expedition escape from this world?” Questor Shannon was imploring. “How did the people of the Ambler Expedition escape?”

“How would I know?” Glic’s voice sang. “I’m just a little kid. Move it along though, folks! Don’t block the concourse! We’re going too. Some of us are going to get on Quiz Ship whether you make or not. We want loose from here.”

But the Gaea people were being torn apart by tides and concussions. They were drowning in boiling mud, in boiling air. Then there was a horrible constriction. They were being forced through the suffocating gullet of the most dread dragon of them all. Yes, swallowed up.

“It’s nothing but a psychic storm, people,” said the boyish voice of Glic. “Don’t they have them on Gaea too? Keep saying to yourselves ‘This is fun, is is fun.’ We might make it through and get loose.”

Then they were through the gullet and into the very maw of the devouring dragon. And the maw heaved and launched. It was moving through space!

No, it was a dragon’s maw only in a manner of speaking. The Chute had been a very tight gullet to go through, but it had been the Chute that swallowed them up. Now they were inside Quiz Ship and it was in acceleration away from Paleder World.

“We’re loose, we’re loose, And Paleder’s the Goose,” eight little dragons were chanting.

Little dragons or not, they were loose and in flight. Four of the Quiz Ship people were there. And there were nine dragons who had begun to shed their dragonness. Some of them were becoming approximately human children. One of the fastest-shedding of them was Glic, who was recognized by his voice.

“You sure are lucky we wanted to go with you, or you’d never have made it,” Glic chirped. He was a red-headed little boy with a bit of dragon spirit still abiding in him.

“One of us is missing,” Manbreaker Crag grumbled. “There are only four of us now and there supposed to be five. Does anybody know which of us is missing?”

Questor Shannon was at the controls of Quiz Ship now, though the only direction he was able to give it was “Away from here! Get us loose!”

Then they were loose, and Questor was singing a glum ditty, but his voice was a little more cheeful than usual:

“After the world is over,  
After the minds are gone.”

“It was a bust, of course,” Jingo Blood was saying. “Their famed technology was wonderful, I suppose. But it was not wonderful for us. And it was not for export. “

“Oh, you are wrong, lady!” eight children with tatters of dragonness still clinging to them cried out.

“You are still sick from the psychic storm, people,” Glic cried. “But look at the bright side — us. I am here, and with me are seven companions more witty than myself. We know a lot of that technology, but we don’t lock ourselves inside it. That’s why we wanted loose from Paleder, so wouldn’t become post-people too. They had become post-space-flight, and where would that leave an adventurous person like me? We know the gadgets and technologies, though. Eight brainfuls of technologies you’re getting with us.”

“One of us is missing,” Manbreaker insisted. “Bodicea, which one of us is missing? Oh, it’s Bodicea who isn’t here.”

“I’m here,” she said.

“Bodicea, get out of that dragon suit!” Manbreaker roared.

“It isn’t a dragon suit. It’s me,” she said. “I wasn’t quite ready to grow up anyhow.” Nevertheless, the dragoning was falling off her in big pieces, and soon it would be gone.

“We’re just little kids,” said a little girl who still had her hair full of dragon scales, “but we’re insufferably smart on that technology already. We can’t give you enough of it to turn you into post-people with everything completed, but we can sure give you enough to pop your eyes. I bet we can set all the Gaea guys to gaping with what we know.”

It wasn’t really too difficult to understand the Demotic or Low Galactic that the children spoke.

“We couldn’t see any future in that post-people stuff we were

supposed to grow into,” another of them said, “but we look forward to life with backward people like you.”

“I knew we’d stumble on the answer,” the Empress Jingo guffawed. “‘Creative Chaos’ that was the answer.”

“Thank you,” Glic said. “You’re lucky we met you.”

## BEQUEST OF WINGS

“Do you have to play that damned wind-harp in here every evening?” Potter Firmholder complained to his skinny daughter.

“I don’t, no. I’m not here every evening, dear Potter,” the daughter Angela said. “You yourself say that I’m never here. Oh, Potter, I need seven hundred and twenty dollars for a pinion-pick for this harp. It does save the pinion bones, you know.”

“Oh, Skinny Angel, you could get a gold pick for that,” said Peggy Firmholder, her mother.

“Well, of course it will be gold,” Angela said. “Should I have a pot-metal pick when all the other kids have gold ones?”

“You must think money grows in the clouds,” Potter grumbled. “You young people have got to come down to Earth.”

“Potter Firmholder, give the child the money!” Peggy said. “Everything has gone up.”

“It’s the things that have gone up unnaturally that disrupt me,” Potter still complained. “Here, Angel, here’s the money. I’m sorry I was cranky. What, off again? You’d better eat something before you go.”

“I’ll catch something on the wing,” Angela said. She swept out with the wind-harp and the money, and it was plain that she was on her way to Cloudy Joe’s Drug Store. Cloudy Joe had gold picks for wind-harps. He had ‘wing-glo’ wash. He had struts and canvas and tar, and white condor feathers, and pinion wires, and airplane glue; even food and drink and tapes and magazines, and cloud moss, and wax-bug candies, everything that one might want.

“I don’t like her longing around Cloudy Joe’s Drug Store so much,” Potter Firmholder told his wife. “There’s something a little bit wrong with that place.”

“When you were that age, you hung around Ace Whizz-Bang’s Tavern,” Peggy said. “And, Potter, there was more than a little bit wrong with that place. Cloudy Joe’s is a cult spot.”

“So is Ace Whizz-Bang’s,” said Potter. Used to hang around Ace Whizz-Bang’s? Potter still did. It was better than Cloudy Joe’s Drug Store with all those high-flying young people crowding into it.

“I don’t even know how Cloudy Joe’s stays there,” Potter said. “It’s against all common-sense rules.”

“Oh, Potter, I’ve explained it to you a dozen times, and so has Angela,” Peggy said. “It’s held up there by the new mathematics, by a Fortean Vector Value. Between the Euclidean and the Einsteinian universes there are thin intrusions known as the Fortean Universe. And Fortean Universe Vectors are strong enough to hold almost anything up, if they don’t have to hold it up too far. Yeah, that’s the patter for it, but I don’t know what holds such places up either. They weren’t up there before people discovered those vector values. Would they fall down again if people forgot the vectors? Poor Angela’s getting more and more fearful as the time runs out on all of it. They’re allowed six weeks of it after full sprout, and the time’s nearly up. Young people have a very hard time of it nowadays; the ‘lightest and brightest’ of them do anyhow.”

“Bat-wings, bat-wings!” jeered Ace Whizz-Bang as some of the Bat-Wing gang swooped by his front door. “Do you knew, ‘Mealyous, bat wings used to be cited against the old Natural Selection theory?” (They called Potter Firmholder ‘Mealyous at Ace Whizz-Bang’s and at other places.) “For a great evolutionary change to come about, it was argued, there had to be some advantage offered at every step on the wiy to that change, or how would the change be carried through? But where was the every-step advantage when a mousey rodent was growing wings and turning into a bat? Where was the advantage during those several million years when the changing thing wasn’t wing enough to fly with and was too elongated and spread in the fingers to be used as a hand or a foot or a claw? It couldn’t be walked on. It couldn’t be manipulated. It couldn’t be flown with. Why have it for a million years then? But now the main arguments against Natural Selection are that it didn’t happen, and that there just isn’t time to wait for it in a busy world.”

“And the main arguments against Sudden Mutation are that it does happen, and that there just isn’t time to get used to it even in a fast-moving world,” ‘Mealyous Firmholder said. “It’s hard on the young people, the high-flyers of them, and it’s hard on their parents too. It was once said that the great menance hanging over mankind was the mushroom cloud. I suppose that wasn’t true, since nobody really paid any attention to it. But now the greatest menance hanging over these lightest and brightest of the young people is the bolt-cutter. And they just can’t avoid paying attention to it.”

“Aye, they live on the sky-brink for a while, and then they fall off it,”

Ace Whizz-Bang said. "I was too old for it. It hadn't appeared yet in my youth (Oh, I guess there were a few dozen or so cases in California), so my youth had to be complicated by lesser things. Even today you will seldom see a 'stubby' who's more than twenty-eight or thirty years old. And the older uncropped ones are still younger than that. They get ungainly and crash-prone and they die within five years of their escaping the bolt-cutter. Now even the flyers say that they're not supposed to escape it. They say that their failures are bringing the full thing nearer every day."

"It's easy enough to set them down as trivial and flighty," Firmholder said. "Of course they are. They are young and ignorant, and extravagant in their views. But they seem to have a genuinely beautiful and thrilling mystique."

"Fragile though," Whiz-Bang said. "It's pathetic really. And it'll be traumatic to them in later life likely, though none of the afflicted ones have had a later life yet. There's only two things we can do about it. We can live with the sorrowful situation, or we can destroy the 'lightest and brightest' of the children as soon as they can be spotted."

"They're hard to spot before they're about fifteen years old and start to sprout," Firmholder said. "And a person rather hates to kill his fifteen year old son or daughter, whatever the logic of the situation."

"Nah, that wouldn't bother me much" Ace Whizz-Bang said. "A bunch of pupa-stage punks is what they are. One good thing about it all, though, you can really make bar glasses shine with that 'wing-glo' wash they've brought out."

Well, Angola Firinholder grew pale and wait during the crisis weeks.

"Aren't you rather overdoing the 'touch of death' role, Angie," her father tried to josh her once, to lift her out of her sadness. But Angola burst into tears and flew off.

"You shouldn't have said that, Potter," Peggy told him. "It's so terrible a thing for children of that age."

"Oh, I know it, I know it, Peg. I was just trying to jolly her a little bit. When we were young people, we were motorcycle nuts, and we loved the speed and noise. Now they go much faster, but they're not half as noisy about it."

"It must be horrible to be clipped," Peggy said, "and to be a 'stubby' and a 'hubby' for the rest of one's short life. They have to continue in such

clumsiness of hands with only a little improvement. And they lose their beauty of voice and are adept at so few things. And it's only the lightest and the brightest who are afflicted so far. All their lives they will seem awkward, even to those more awkward and slow-witted ones who never were light and bright."

"I still wish that she wouldn't hang around Cloudy Joe's Drug Store so much."

"Leave it alone, Potter, and leave her alone. Cloudy Joe's is a cult place, and their cult is all they have to sustain them during the metamorphical horror."

"Well, I wish she'd agree to have it done in a hospital where it's clean."

"No, Potter, no. That would be uncult."

Those lightest and brightest of the young poeple did have remakably beautiful voices during the weeks of their affliction. And the wind-harps that they played upon had a full and gusty sound. The cult songs that they sang had trivial words and times, but their renditions were superb. It was like honey from Heaven when those sounds drifted down. They were airy songs, sky songs, soaring songs, pinnacle songs. There was a complexity to their music that wasn't to be found in even the worst of the Rocks and Grocks.

The 'brightest' liked to perch on high pinnacles, on towers, on spires, on eagle cliffs. They held their bright and sparkling congresses in these places and in places even higher, such as Cloudy Joe's Drug Store on its Fortean sky-lodge.

A 'flight' of young people was mutually supporting in the terrible spiritual and physical crisis that the members were passing through. Whatever shame was in their condition was at least shared shame for members of a flight. Most of the suicides of the 'brightest' young people were of lone eagles, not of 'flight' members.

Together, the shame of eating insects and cicadas, and even small birds caught on the wing, was a mitigated shame. The appetite for these things was as relentless as it was sudden. Eat them they must, and it was better that they eat them together.

The physical clumsiness of the brightest could not be overcome singly, but in group it could be partly overcome. No afflicted person could bring his own fingers together, could bring his two hands together. But two persons might bring their now elongated thumbs together for

manipulation or handling, or might bring the knobs of their pinion bones together. Tools were devised (the pinion-pick for playing the wind-harp was only one of them) to slip over the ends of pinion bones in order to push or hook or grasp.

Working together, the young people could assemble bat-wings out of struts and canvas plastered with tar, or bird-wings out of plasti-hedelion fibre and feathers. It didn't take very much manufactured equipment, slipped over newly deformed hands and arms and shoulders, to achieve conquest of the unaccustomed environment.

There was cult culture in this, cult music, achingly close cult friendships and companionships, courtships that were almost magic, and exaltation in the higher air.

There came an incredible chestiness to the young men of the afflicted cults, and an incredible breastiness to the young women. The wing-beat muscles had developed superbly. And so had the winged voices. Their song was absolutely extraordinary, as was the orchestration of their wind-harps. Sheet music for most of this superb body of melody can be had at Cloudy Joe's Drug Store, and at other such places around the world. There is one of them in every sky.

Angela Firmholder was at one of those 'high-places' in the twilight meeting with other young and soaring personalities who mided up her 'flight'. Carolyn Bushbaby, Rod Murdock, Peter King-feather, Alice Tombigbee, Clyde Boggles, Hester Hilltop! They were fellow adventurers in the furthest biological adventure since the primordial clay stretched itself and breathed. They were companions of Air and Earth. They were friends and lovers. Ah, soaring and swooping in the early darkness! It was poignant that it could last only six weeks.

"It is a damnable, contagious, crippling arthritis, and it is no other thing," Doctor Hexbird had written in Today's Future. "It strikes only adolescents of a highly sensitive and a highly talented nature. The 'Lightest and Brightest' designation is as much truth as poetry, but it is a tragic truth. It is the flower of the younger generation that is stricken with this dreaded and painful, and sometimes fatal sickness.

"The fingers and hands become so elongated and splayed that they can no longer be used for human hands. They cannot grasp, they cannot manipulate. It would almost be better if the hands were chopped off completely. What must be chopped off, however, are two outlaw growths



on each side, two very long bone spurs call the greater and lesser pinion bones. These new spur-bones change the whole deportment of the victim; this is the reason that they must be removed after they have become hard bone. They can be cut with bone-saws, but in unapproved and cultic operations they are cut with bolt-cutters. Then these bones must be pulled out of the flesh for their entire length. This bloody laying-open of breast and shoulders and neck and arms and back to get the long bones out is a traumatic horror. The thirty per cent mortality in these cultic operations is outrageous.

“After the two giant bone-spurs are removed, the pain of the unusual arthritis will often disappear. There is no way that the length of hand and finger bones can be reduced, but the hands can regain a slight bit of their agility. They can never be fully human hands after such a deformity, but they can be used a little bit.

“When the two pinion-spurs have come to their full length, and just before they must be removed, it is possible for the victims, by the use of a few slight strut-like and wing-like attachments, to fly.”

“We might expect even a sudden mutation, if so far-reaching as this (a flightless species acquiring flight) to take from three million to twelve million years. Now that we are actually observing it, we find that the period is much shorter than that. The whole cycle is about sixty days in the individual; possibly it will be sixty years in the species (this to include second-stage and third-stage development also). It has come too swiftly for the individual or group personality to adjust to it fully as yet. There are cases of unhappiness and death. And the physical retreat from its implications (the retreat should disappear in the second or third stage of the mutation) is incomplete and unpleasant and very often fatal.

“Why do the ‘lightest and brightest’ of these mutated flyers accept the cropping of their wings and their frequent deaths? They accept it because it is necessary for the mutation. The complete flyers will not descend physically from these ‘brightest’. These will not have any descent. And yet the mutation could not be completed without their trail-blazing and destruction. There is a biological imperative here, but its mechanism is still not clear.

“Ah, it is a great privilege to live in the time of an actual, major, rapid mtitatioil.” So wrote Dr. Rudolph Redstern in *Tomorrow’s Flight*.

“With cloud-grown mosses for my bed,

And wax-bug candles at my head.”

That was part of the instructions that Angela Firmholder wrote for her parents, in case of her death. And she added an explanation in prose:

“The cloud-moss may be had in thirty kilo bales (one bale of it will make up into a nice death-bed) at Cloudy Joe’s Drug Store, for fifty dollars a kilo. it is the real moss that grows on the shady side of clouds, and it is the softest moss there is.

“The wax candles are to made from the waxen insects that we catch and eat in flight. Some of the more enterprising people catch them against their own deaths, and to sell. I have been a lazy flyer and I did not provide for myself, so you must buy them. I want three of these wax candles, from fat-bugs, from wax-bugs, and from rush-bugs. They are for sale at Cloudy joe’s Drug Store for six hundred dollars a candle. I know that you will not begrudge me these for my last rites.

“I expect to die from the clipping. I don’t much want to live on as a ‘stuby’ or a ‘nubby’, but I will if that is ordained for me. The clipping is the case and the law now. Soon there will be other cases and other laws. The big thing is almost here, and the destruction of a few of us early flyers prepares the way for it. In half a century all the people will fly, without device and without shame, and without pain or tortuous effort.

“Rod Murdock, who is my first sky-companion, will clip my pinion bones with the ritual bolt cutters. Then all the members of my flight will lay me over and remove these newest of bones, the pinions. And then a new member will take my place in the ‘flight’. Then I will be brought here, for the death of a flyer, or for the life of a ‘nubby’. But I will not be ashamed in any case.

“People will not need hands when they are grown to full flight and to full flight custom. We will not need anything manufactured, not even wind-harps. When the days of fullness arrive, our distal feathers will sound like wind-harps.”

“What I think,” said Ace Whizz-Bang, “is that before the end of this century there will be two kinds of people. The ‘lightest and the brightest’ will have become bird-people complete. I say, let them go. Let them become birds. To me, there was always something a little bit too-much about those lightest and brightest anyhow.

“And the other kind of people will be ourselves, the old people. We will be somewhat improved by getting rid of the flighty element in

ourselves, and we will be ready to tackle another million years of it. Say, 'Mealy, there's six of those flying kids coming down over your house right now, and it looks like they're carrying your daughter between them. Was this the day she was supposed to be cropped?'

"This was the day, Whizz-Bang. Oh, my poor skinny Angela!" Firmholder cried, and he hurried the half block to his home.

"Potter Famealyous Firmholder," said loving wife Peggy. "They're bringing her in now. Is she not beautiful?"

"Beautiful," breathed Potter. "Oh, the poor creature!"

The young 'flight' people brought Angela down and laid her on the cloud-moss bed. She was white with fright and pain, and red with blood. But she smiled.

Somebody brought a display of pinnacle roses from Cloudy Joe's Drug Store. Somebody lit the wax-bug candles.

"Oh, my poor skinny angel," Peggy Firmholder mourned her daughter.

There was a musical tone of distal feathers ruffling in the wind of a long swoop downwards. They sounded ever so much like wind-harps.

"Oh, how cult!" cried Peggy.

## BRIGHT COINS IN NEVER-ENDING STREAM

People sometimes became exasperated with Matthew Quoin, that tedious old shuffler. Sometimes? Well, they were exasperated with him almost all the time. It isn't that people aren't patient and kind-hearted. All of them in our town are invariably so. But Matthew could sure ruffle a kind-hearted surface.

"Oh, he is so slow about it!" people said of him. That wasn't true, Matthew's fingers flew lightninglike when he was involved in a transaction. It was just that so very many movements were required of him to get anything at all transacted.

And then the stories that he told about his past, a very far-distant past according to him, were worn out by repetition.

"Oh, was I ever the cock of the walk!" he would say. "I left a trail of twenty-dollar gold pieces around the world three times, and that was when twenty dollars was still worth something. I always paid everything with twenty-dollar gold pieces, and there was no way that I could ever run out of them. Ten of them, a hundred of them, a thousand of them, I could lay them out whenever they were needed. I had a cruse of oil that would never be empty, as the Bible says. I had a pocketbook that would never be without coin. I was the cock of the walk. Plague take it all, I still am! Has anybody ever seen me without money?"

No, nobody had. It was just that, of late years, it took Matthew's money so long to add up. And often people had to wait behind him for a long time while he counted it out, and they became Sulky and even furious.

When people became weary of listening to Matthew's stories (and of late years he could feel their weariness for him like a hot blast) he went and talked to the pigeons. They, at least, had manners.

"The bloom is off the plum now," he would tell those red-footed peckers, "and the roses of life have become a little ratty for me. But I will not run out of coin. I have the promise that I will not. I got that promise as part of a dubious transaction, but the promise has held up now for more years and decades than you would believe. And I will not die till I am death-weary of taking coin out of my pocketbook: I have that promise also. How would I ever be weary of drawing coins out of my pocketbook?"

"This began a long time ago, you see, when the pigeons were no bigger

than the jenny-wrens are now. They had just started to mint the American twenty-dollar gold piece, and I had them in full and never-ending flow. I tell you that a man can make an impression if he has enough gold pieces. Ah, the ladies who were my friends! Lola Montez, Squirrel Alice, Marie Laveau, Sarah Bernhardt, Empress Elizabeth of Austria. And the high ladies were attracted to me for myself as well as for my money. I was the golden cock of the golden walk.

“You ask what happened to those golden days?” Matthew said to the pigeons, who hadn’t asked anything except maybe, “How about springing for another box of Cracker Jacks?”

“Oh, the golden days are still with me, though technically they are the copper days now. I was promised eight bright eons of ever-flowing money, and the eight of the eons could last (along with my life) as long as I wished it to last.

“And, when the first eon of flowing money slipped into the second, it didn’t diminish my fortune much. It was still an unending stream of gold. Now they were five-dollar gold pieces instead of twenty-dollar gold pieces, but when there is no limit to the number of them, what difference does that make? I would take one out of my pocketbook, and immediately there would be another one in it waiting to be taken.”

“I suppose I really had the most fun when I was known as the Silver Dollar Kid,” Matthew Quoin told them. He was talking to squirrels rather than pigeons now, and it was a different day. But one day was very much like another.

“I never cared overly for money. I just don’t want to run out of it. And I have the promise that my pocketbook will always have one more coin in it. I liked that sound of silver dollars on a counter, and I’d ring them down as fast as one a second when I wished to make all impression. And they rang like bells. I was in my pleasant maturity then, and life was good to me. I was the guy they all noticed. They called me ‘Show Boat’ and ‘the Silver Dollar Sport.’ I always tipped a dollar for everything. That was when money was worth ten times what it is now and a dollar was really something. What, squirrels, another sack of peanuts, you say? Sure I can afford it! The girl at the kiosk will be a little impatient with me because it takes the so long to get enough coins out, but we don’t care about that, do we?”

The fact was that Mitiliew Quoin, though he still commanded a

shining and unending stream of money, had a poor and shabby look about him in these days of the eighth coin. As part of an old and dubious transaction, he had the promise that he could live as long as he wished, but that didn't prevent him from becoming quite old. He had a grubby little room. Je would get up at three o'clock every Friday morning and begin to pull coins one at a time (there was no possible way except one at a time) out of his pocketbook. It was one of those small, three-section, snap-jaw pocketbooks such as men used to carry to keep their coins and bills in. It was old, but it was never-failing. Matthew would draw the coins out one at a time. He would count them into piles. He would roll them into rolls. And at eight o'clock in the morning, when his weekly rent was due, he would pay it proudly, twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents. So he would be fixed for another week. It took him from three until eight o'clock every Friday morning to do this; but he cat-napped quite a bit during that time. All oldsters cat-nap a lot.

And it didn't really take him very long (no more than five or six minutes) to draw out enough coins for one of his simple lunch-counter meals. But some people are a little bit testy at having to wait even five or six minutes behind an old man at the cashier's stand.

"I was known as the Four-Bit Man for a few years, and that was all right," Matthew Quoin said. "Then I was known as the Two-Bit Man for a few other years, and that was all right too." This was a different day, and Matthew was talking to a flock of grackle-birds who were committing slaughter on worms, slugs, and other crawlers in the grass of City Park. "It didn't begin to hurt till I was known as the Dime-a-Time Man," Matthew said, "and that stuck in the throat of my pride a little bit, although it shouldn't have. I was still the cock of the grassy walk even though I didn't have as many hens as I had once. I had good lodgings, and I had plenty to eat and drink. I could buy such clothes as I needed, though it flustered me a bit to make a major purchase. We had come into the era of the hundred-dollar overcoat then, and to draw out one thousand coins, one by one, with people perhaps waiting, can be a nervous thing.

"I began to see that there was an element of humor in that dubious transaction that I had made so many years ago, and that part of the joke was on me. Oh, I had won every point of argument when we had made that deal. The pocketbook was calfskin, triple-stitched, and with German

silver snap-latch. It was absolutely guaranteed never to be clear empty of coin, and it should last forever. Each coin appeared in the very bottom of the pocketbook, that's true, and the contrivance was rather deep and with a narrow mouth, so it did take several seconds to fish each dime out. But it was a good bargain that I made, and all parties still abide by it. The Dime-a-Time years weren't bad.

“Nor were the nickel years really. There is nothing wrong with nickels. Dammit, the nickel is the backbone of commerce! It was in the nickel years that I began to get rheumatism in my fingers, and that slowed me down. But it had nothing to do with the bargain, which was still a good one.”

When the penny years rolled around, Matthew Quoin was quite old. Likely he was not as old as he claimed to be, but he was the oldest and stringiest cock around.

“But it's all as bright as one of my new pennies,” he said to a multitude of army caterpillars that was destroying the fine grass in City Park. “And this is the eighth and final eon of the overflowing money, and it will go on forever for me unless I tell it to stop. Why should I tell it to stop? The flow of money from my pocketbook is as vital to me as the flow of blood through my veins. And the denomination cannot be diminished further. There is no smaller coin than the copper penny.”

“It didn't go all that bright and shining with Matticw Quoin in the penny years, though. The rheumatism had bitten deeper into his hands and fingers, and now his lightning fingers were slow lightning indeed. The “time is money” saying applied to Matthew more explicitly than it had ever applied to anyone else, and there were quite a few slownesses conspiring to eat up his valuable time.

And every time that prices went up, by the same degree was he driven down. After five years in the peniiy eon he was driven down plenty.

“If it takes me five hours just to draw out and count the money for my week's rent, then things are coming to an intolerable stage with me,” he said. “Something is going to have to give.” Something gave.

The government decreed that, due to the general inflation of the economy and the near-worthlessness of the one-cent piece, or penny, that coin would no longer be minted. And, after a cutoff date in the near future, it would no longer be legal tender either.

“What will I do now?” Matthew Quoin asked himself.

He went to talk to the people at the Elite Metal Salvage Company, Scavenger Department.

“How much a pound will you give me for copper pennies?” he asked.

“Two cents a pound,” the man said. “There hasn’t been very much copper in copper pennies for years and years.”

“There is in these,” Matthew said. “They follow the specifications of the earliest minting.” He showed several of them to the man.

“Amazing, amazing!” the man said. “They’re almost pure copper. Five cents a pound.”

“I don’t know if I can live on that or not,” Matthew Quoin said, “but I’ve no choice except to try.”

Matthew Quoin changed his life style a bit. He gave up his lodging room. He slept in a seldom-flooded storm sewer instead. But it was still a hard go.

A nickel a pound! Do you know how many pennies, pulled out rheumatically one by one, it takes to make a pound? Do you know how many nickels it takes now just to get a cup of coffee and an apple fritter for breakfast? Matthew Quoin had started at three-thirty that morning. It would be ten o’clock before he had enough to take to the Elite Metal Salvage Company to sell for legal tender. It would be ten-thirty before he had his scanty breakfast. And then back to the old penny-fishing again. His fingers were scabbed and bleeding. It would be almost midnight before he had enough (yes, the Elite Metal Salvage Company did do business at night; that’s when they did a lot of their purchasing of stolen metal) to trade in for supper money. And that would represent only one hamburger with everything on it, and one small glass of spitzo. But Matthew would never be clear broke. He was still cock of the walk.

“Now here is where it gets rough,” Matthew Quoin said. “Suppose that I give up and am not able to live on the bright flow of coins, and I die (for I cannot die until I do give up); suppose that I die, then I will have lost the dubious transaction that I made so long ago. I’ll have been outsmarted on the deal, and I cannot have that. That fellow bragged that he’d never lost on a transaction of this sort, and he rubbed it in with a smirk. We’ll just see about that. I’ve not given up yet, though I do need one more small morsel of food if I’m to live through the day. Do you yourself ever get discouraged, robin?”

Matthew Quoin was talking to a lone robin that was pulling worms out



of the browned grass that was beginning to be crusted with the first snow of the season. But the robin didn't answer.

"You live on the promise of spring, robin, though you do well even now," Quoin said. "I also have a new promise to live for. I have been given a fresh lease on life today, though it will be about seven years before I call put that lease into effect. But, after you're old, seven years go by just like nothing. A person in the Imperial Coin Nook (it's in a corner of the Empire Cigar and Hash Store) says that in about seven years my coins will have value, and eventually he will be able to pay a nickel or dime or even fifteen cents for each of them. And that is only the beginning, he says: in fifty years they may be worth eighty cents or even a dollar each. I am starting to put one coin out of every three into a little cranny in my sewer to save them. Of course, for those seven years that I wait, I will go hungrier by one third. But this promise is like a second sun coming up in the morning. I will rise and shine with it."

"Bully for you," the robin said.

"So I have no reason to be discouraged," Quoin went on. "I have a warm and sheltered sewer to go to. And I have had a little bit, though not enough, to eat today. I hallucinate, and I'm a trifle delirious and silly, I know. I'm lighthearted, but I believe I could make it if I had just one more morsel to eat. This has been the worst of my days foodwise, but they may get a little bit better if I live through this one. It will be a sort of turning of the worm for me now. Hey, robin, that was pretty good, the turning of the worm. Did you get it?"

"I got it," said the robin. "It was pretty good."

"And how is it going with yourself?" Matthew Quoin asked.

"There's good days and bad ones," the robin said. "This is a pretty good one. After the other robins have all gone south, I have pretty good worm-hunting."

"Do you ever get discouraged?"

"I don't let myself," the robin said. "Fight on, I say. It's all right today. I'm about full now."

"Then I'll fight on too," Matthew swore. "One extra morsel would save my life, I believe. And you, perhaps, robin —"

"What do you have in mind?" the robin asked.

"Ah, robin, if you're not going to eat the other half of that worm —"

"No, I've had plenty. Go ahead," the robin said.

## SELENIUM GHOSTS OF THE EIGHTEEN SEVENTIES

Even today, the “invention” of television is usually ascribed to Paul Nipkow of Germany, and the year is given as 1884. Nipkow used the principle of the variation in the electrical conductivity of selenium when exposed to light, and he used scanning discs as mechanical effectors. What else was there for him to use before the development of the photo tube and the current-amplifying electron tube? The resolution of Nipkow’s television was very poor due to the “slow light” characteristics of selenium response and the lack of amplification. There were, however, several men in the United States who transmitted a sort of television before Nipkow did so in Germany.

Resolution of the images of these even earlier experimenters in the field (Aurelian Bentley, Jessy Polk, Samuel J. Perry, Gifford Hudgeons) was even poorer than was the case with Nipkow. Indeed, none of these pre-Nipkow inventors in the television field is worthy of much attention, except Bentley. And the interest in Bentley is in the content of his transmissions and not in his technical ineptitude.

It is not our object to enter into the argument of who really did first “invent” television (it was not Paul Nipkow, and it probably was not Aurelian Bentley or Jessy Polk either); our object is to examine some of the earliest true television dramas in their own queer “slow light” context. And the first of those “slow light” or selenium (“moonshine”) dramas were put together by Aurelian Bentley in the year 1873.

The earliest art in a new field is always the freshest and is often the best. Homer composed the first and freshest, and probably the best, epic poetry. Whatever cave man did the first painting, it remains among the freshest as well as the best paintings ever done. Aeschylus composed the first and best tragic dramas, Euclid invented the first and best of the artful mathematics (we speak here of mathematics as an art without being concerned with its accuracy or practicality). And it may be that Aurelian Bentley produced the best of all television dramas in spite of their primitive aspect.

Bentley’s television enterprise was not very successful despite his fee of one thousand dollars per day for each subscriber. In his heyday (or his hey-month, November of 1873), Bentley had fifty-nine subscribers in New York City, seventeen in Boston, fourteen in Philadelphia, and one in

Hoboken. This gave him an income of ninety-one thousand dollars a day (which would be the equivalent of about a million dollars a day in today's terms), but Bentley was extravagant and prodigal, and he always insisted that he had expenses that the world wotted not of. In any case, Bentley was broke and out of business by the beginning of the year 1874. He was also dead by that time.

The only things surviving from The Wonderful World of Aurelian Bentley are thirteen of the "slow light" dramas, the master projector, and nineteen of the old television receivers. There are probably others of the receivers around somewhere, and person coming onto them might not know what they are for. They do not look much like the television sets of later years.

The one we use for playing the old dramas is a good kerosene powered model which we found and bought for eighteen dollars two years ago. If the old sets are ever properly identified and become collectors' items, the price on them may double or even triple. We told the owner of the antique that it was a chestnut roaster, and with a proper rack installed it could likely be made to serve as that.

We bought the master projector for twenty-six dollars. We told the owner of that monster that it was a chicken incubator. The thirteen dramas in their canisters we had for thirty-nine dollars total. We had to add formaldehyde to activate the dramas, however, and we had to add it to both the projector and the receiver; the formaldehyde itself came to fifty-two dollars. I discovered soon that the canisters with their dramas were not really needed, not was the master projector. The receiver itself would repeat everything that it had ever received. Still and all, it was money well spent.

The kerosene burner activated a small dynamo that imposed an electrical grid on the selenium matrix and awakened the memories of the dramas.

There was, however, an oddity in all the playbacks. The film-fix of the receiver continued to receive impressions so that every time a "slow light" drama is presented it is different, because of the feedback. The resolution of the pictures improves with use and is now much clearer and more enjoyable than originally.

The librettos of the first twelve of the thirteen Bentley dramas are not good, not nearly as good as the librettos of the Jessy Polk and the Samuel

J. Perry dramas later in the decade. Aurelian Bentley was not a literary man; he was not even a completely literate man. His genius had many gaping holes in it. But he was a passionately dramatic man, and these dramas which he himself devised and directed have a great sweep and action to them. And even the librettos from which he worked are valuable for one reason. They tell us, though sometimes rather ineptly and vaguely, what the dramas themselves are all about. Without these outlines, we would have no idea in the world of the meaning of the powerful dramas.

There was an unreality, a “ghostliness”, about all the dramas, as though they were made by sewer light underground; or as if they were made by poor quality moonlight. Remember that the element selenium (the metal that is not a metal), the chemical basis of the dramas, is named from Selene, the moon.

Bentley did not use “moving pictures” of quickly succeeding frames to capture and transmit his live presentation dramas. Although Muybridge was in fact working on the zoopraxi scope (the first “moving picture” device) at that very time, his still incomplete work was not known to Aurelian Bentley. Samuel J. Perry and Gifford Hudgeons did use “moving picture” techniques for their primitive television dramas later in the decade; but Bentley, fortunately perhaps, did not. Each of Bentley’s thirty-minute live dramas, however it appeared for the first time in the first television receiver, was recorded in one single matrix or frame: and, thereafter, that picture took on a life and growth of its own. It was to some extent independent of sequence (an effect that has been attempted and failed of in several of the other arts); and it had a free way with time and space generally. This is part of the “ghostliness” of the dramas, and it is a large part of their power and charm. Each drama was one evolving moment outside of time and space (though mostly the scenes were in New York City and the Barrens of New Jersey).

Of course there was no sound in these early Bentley dramas, but let us not go too far astray with that particular “of course”. “Slow sound” as well as “slow light” is a characteristic of selenium response, and we will soon see that sound did in fact creep into some of the dramas after much replaying. Whether their total effects were accidental or by design, these early television dramas were absolutely unique.

The thirteen “slow light” dramas produced by Aurelian Bentley in the

year 1873 (the thirteenth of them, the mysterious Pettifoggers of Philadelphia, lacks Bentley's "Seal of Production", and indeed it was done after his death: and yet he appears as a major character in it) the thirteen were these:

1. The Perils of Patience, a Damnable Chase. In this, Clarinda Calliope, who was possibly one of the greatest actresses of American or world drama, played the part of Patience Palmer in the title role. Leslie Whitemansion played the role of Simon Legree. Kirbac Fouet played the part of "the Whip", a sinister character. X. Paul McCoffin played the role of "the Embalmer". Jaime del Diablo played "the Jesuit", one of the most menacing roles in all drama. Torres Malgre played "the Slaver", who carried the forged certificate showing that Patience had a shadow of black blood and so might be returned to slavery on San Croix. Inspiro Spectralski played "the Panther" (Is he a Man? Is he a Ghost?), who is the embodiment of an evil that is perhaps from beyond the world. Hubert Saint Nicholas played the part of "the Guardian", who is really a false guardian.

This Damnable Chase is really a galloping allegory. It is the allegory of good against evil, of light against darkness, of inventiveness against crude obtuseness, of life against death, of openness against intrigue, of love against hatred, of courage against hellish fear. For excitement and intensity, this drama has hardly an equal. Time and again, it seemed that the Embalmer, striking out of the dark, would stab Patience with his needle full of the dread embalming fluid and so trap her in the rigidity of living death. Time and again, it seemed that the Whip would cut the flesh of Patience Palmer with his long lash with viper poison on its iron tip that would bring instant death. At every eventuality, it seemed as though Simon Legree or the slaver would enslave her body, or the Jesuit or the Panther would enslave her soul. And her mysterious Guardian seems always about to save her, but his every attempt to save her has such reverse and disastrous effects as to cast doubt on the honesty and sincerity of the Guardian.

A high point of the drama is the duel of the locomotives that takes place during a tempestuous night in the West Orange Shipping Yards. Again and again, Patience Palmer is all but trapped on railroad trestles by thundering locomotives driven by her adversaries (the West Orange Switching Yards seem to consist almost entirely of very high railroad

trestles). Patience finally gets control of a locomotive of her own on which to escape, but the locomotives of her enemies thunder at her from every direction so that she is able to switch out of their way only at the last brink of every moment.

The Embalmer attempts to stab her with his needleful of embalming fluid every time their locomotives pass each other with double thunder and only inches to spare. The Whip tries to lash her with his cruel lash with its poisoned tip; and the Slaver threatens her with the outreached forged certificate of color, and only by fantastic cringing can she cringe back far enough to keep from being touched by it as their locomotives roar past each other in opposite directions.

It seems impossible that the racing locomotives can come so close and not hit each other, with their dazzling switching from track to track. And then (Oh, God save us all!) the Panther (Is he a Man? Is he a Devil?) has leapt from his own locomotive to that of Patience Palmer: he is behind her on her own locomotive, and she does not see him. He comes closer — But the climax of *The Perils of Patience* is not there in the West Orange Switching Yards. It is at a secret town and castle in the Barrens of New Jersey, a castle of evil repute. In this place the enemies of Patience were assembling a gang of beaters (slack-faced fellows with their tongues cut out), and they were readying bloodhounds to hunt Patience down to her death. She somehow obtains a large wagon piled high with hay and pulled by six large the high-spirited horses. With this, she boldly drives, on a stormy night, into the secret town of her enemies and down that jagged road (there was a lightning storm going on that made everything seem jagged) at the end of which was the castle itself. The bloodhounds leap high at her as she passes, but they cannot pull her from the wagon.

But the Panther (Is he a Man? Is he a Beast?) has leapt onto her hay wagon behind her, and she does not see him. He comes close behind her— But Patience Palmer is already making her move. Driving unswervingly, carrying out her own intrepid plan, at that very moment she raises a key in her hand very high into the air. This draws the lightning down with a stunning flash, and the hay wagon is set ablaze. Patience leaps clear of the flaming hay wagon at the last possible moment, and the blazing, hurtling inferno crashes into the tall and evil castle to set it and its outbuildings and its whole town ablaze.

This is the flaming climax to one of the greatest chase dramas ever.

This final scene of *The Perils* will be met with often later. Due to the character of the “slow light” or selenium scenes, this vivid scene leaks out of its own framework and is superimposed, sometimes faintly, sometimes powerfully, as a ghost scene on all twelve of the subsequent dramas.

2. *Thirsty Daggers*, a Murder Mystery. This is the second of the Aurelian Bentley television dramas of 1873. Clarinda Calliope, one of the most talented actresses of her time, played the part of Maud Trenchant, the Girl Detective. The actors Leslie Whitemansion, Kirbac Fouet, X. Paul McCoffin, Jaime del Diablo, Torres Malgre, Inspiro Spectral ski, and Hubert Saint Nicholas played powerful and menacing roles, but their identities and purposes cannot be set exactly. One must enter into the bloody and thrilling spirit of the drama without knowing the details.

More even than *The Perils of Patience* does *Thirsty Daggers* seem to be freed from the bonds of time and sequence. It is all one unfolding moment, growing always in intensity and intricacy, but not following a straight line of action. And this, accompanied by a deficiency of the libretto, leads to confusion.

The libretto cannot be read. It is darkened and stained. Chemical analysis has revealed that it is stained with human blood. It is our belief that Bentley sent the librettos to his clients decorated with fresh human blood to set a mood. But time has spread the stains, and almost nothing can be read. This is, however, a highly interesting drama, the earliest murder ever done for television.

It is nearly certain that Maud Trenchant, the Girl Detective, overcomes all the menaces and solves all the crimes, but the finer details of this are lost forever.

3. *The Great Bicycle Race*, the third of the Bentley television dramas, has that versatile actress Clarinda Calliope playing the lead role of July Meadowbloom in this joyful and allegorical “journey into summertime”. It is in *The Great Bicycle Race* that sound makes its first appearance in the Bentley dramas. It is the sounds of all outdoors that are heard in this drama, faintly at first, and more and more as time goes on. These are country and village sounds; they are county-fair sounds. Though the sounds seem to be an accidental intrusion (another ghostly side-play of the selenium response magic), yet their quality lends belief to the evidence that the full and original title of this drama was *The Great Bicycle Race*, a Pastoral.

But there are other sounds, sometimes angry, sometimes imploring, sometimes arrogant and menacing — more about them in a bit.

Sheep and cattle sounds are all through the play; goat and horse and swine sounds; the rattle of ducks and geese; all the wonderful noises of the countryside. There are birds and grasshoppers, windmills and wagons, people calling and singing. There are the sounds of carnival barkers and the chants of gamblers and shills. There are the shrieks and giggles of young people.

And then there are those intrusive sounds of another sort, the separate overlay. These seem to be mostly indoor sounds, but sometimes they are outdoor grandstand sounds also, bristling talk in the reserved shadows of crowd noise and roaring.

“No, no, no. I’ll not be had. What sort of a girl do you think I am?”

“All these things I will give you, Clarie. No one else would give you so much. No one else would ever care so much. But now is the time for it. Now is the summer of our lives. Now we cut hay.”

“Let’s just see the price of a good hay barn first, Aurie. Let’s just get some things down on paper right now. We are talking about a summertime check that is as big as all summer. And we are talking about a much larger settlement to back up the other seasons and years.”

“Don’t you trust me, Clarie?”

“Of course I trust you, Ben tie baby. I trust that you will get that trust fund that we are talking about down on paper today. I am a very trusting woman. I believe that we should have a trust fund to cover every condition and circumstance.”

Odd talk that, to be mixed in with the sound of The Great Bicycle Race.

The race was in conjunction with the Tri-county Fair, which counties were Camden, Gloucester, and Atlantic. The bicycle racers rode their twenty-mile course every afternoon for five afternoons, and careful time was kept. There was betting on each day’s race, but there was bigger betting on the final winner with the lowest total time for the five days, and the kitty grew and grew. From the great fairground grandstand, one could see almost all of the twenty-mile course that the riders rode, or could follow it by the plumes of dust. The grandstand was on high ground and the whole countryside was spread out before it. Cattle and mules were paraded and judged in front of that grandstand, before and during



and after that daily race; then the race (for the approximate hour that it took to run it) was the big thing. There were seven drivers in the race, and all of them were world famous: 1. Leslie Whitemansion drive on a Von Sauerbronn “Special” of fine German craftsmanship. This machine, popularly known then as the “whizzer”, would get you there and it would bring you back. It was very roadworthy and surprisingly fast.

2. Kirbac Fouet was on an Ernest Michaux Magicien, a splendid machine. It had a socket into which a small sail might be fitted to give greater speed on a favorable wind.

3. X. Paul McCoffin was on a British Royal Velocipede. There are two things that may be remarked about the British Royal: it had solid rubber tires (the first rubber-tired bicycle ever), and it had class. It had that cluttered austerity of line that only the best of British products have.

4. Jaime del Diablo was on a Pierre Lallement “Boneshaker” with its iron-tired wooden wheels, the front one much larger than the rear.

5. Torres Maigre was on an American-built Richard Warren Sears Roadrunner, the first all-iron machine. “The only wood is in the heads of its detractors” was an advertising slogan used for the Roadrunner.

6. Inspiro Spectralski (Is he a Man? Is he a Cannon Ball?) was riding a Mcracken’s Comet. This comet had won races at several other county fairs around the state.

7. Hubert Saint Nicholas had a machine such as no one in the state had ever seen before. It was a French bicyclette named the Supreme. The bicyclette had the pedals fixed to drive the back wheel by the ingenious use of a chain and sprocket wheel, and so was not, strictly speaking, a bicycle at all. The true bicycles of the other six racers had the pedals attached directly to the front wheels. There was one syndicate of bettors who said the bicyclette had a mechanical advantage, and that Hubert would win on it. But other persons made jokes about this rig whose back wheel would arrive before its front wheel and whose driver would not arrive before the next day.

It was on these great riders that all the six-shot gamblers around were wagering breath-taking sums. It was for them that sports came from as far away as New York City.

Clarinda Calliope played the role of Gloria Goldenfield, the beauty queen of the Tri-county Fair in this drama. But she also played the role of the “Masked Alternate Rider Number Seven”. (All the racing riders had

their alternates to ride in their places in case of emergency.) And Clarinda also played a third role, that of Rakesly Rivertown, the splurging gambler. Who would ever guess that the raffish Rakesly was being played by a woman? The author and director of The Great Bicycle Race did not know anything about Clarinda playing these latter two roles.

The grandstand, the bandstand, the pleasures of a country carnival in the summertime! And the “slow smells” of the selenium-directed matrix just becoming ripe and evocative now! Smell of sweet clover and timothy hay, or hot horses pulling buggies or working in the fields, smells of candy and sausage and summer squash at the eating places at the fair, smells of dusty roads and of green money being counted out and thumped down on betting tables for the bicycle race! And then again there was the override of intrusive voices breaking in on the real summer drama just by accident.

“Clarie, I will do handsomely by you in just a day or so. I have placed very, very heavy bets on the bicycle race, and I will win. I am betting against the wildest gambler in this part of the country, Rakesly Rivertown, and we will have the bet up to a cool million with one more raise. He is betting the field against number seven. And number seven will win.”

“I have heard that this Rakesly Rivertown is about the sharpest gambler anywhere, and that he has a fine figure and makes an extraordinary appearance.”

“A fine figure! Why, the fraud is shaped like a girl! Yes, he is a sharp gambler, but he doesn’t understand mechanics. Number seven, the Supreme, has a rear-wheel drive with gear-ratio advantage. Hubert Saint Nicholas, who is riding number seven, is just toying with the other riders so far to get the bets higher, and he can win whenever he wants to. I will win a million dollars on the race, my love. And I will give it to you, if you act a little bit more like my love.”

“Surely your love for me should transcend any results of a bicycle race, Aurie. If you really loved me, and if you contemplated making such a gift to me, you would make it today. That would show that your appreciation and affection are above mere fortune. And, if you can’t lose, as you say that you cannot, you will have your money in the same amount won back in two days’ time, and you will have made me happy two days longer.”

“All right, I guess so then, Clarie. Yes, I’ll give it to you today. Right

now. I'll write you a check right now."

"Oh, you are a treasure, Aurie. You are a double treasure. You can't guess how double a treasure you are!"

The wonderful Tri-county Fair was near its end, and its Great Bicycle Race with it. It was the last day of the race. Hubert Saint Nicholas on number seven, the Supreme, the French bicyclette with the mechanical advantage, was leading the field by only one minute in total elapsed time going into that last day's racing. There were those who said that Hubert could win any time he wanted to, and that he stayed so close only to keep the bets a-growing.

And the bets did grow. The mysterious gambler with the fine figure and the extraordinary appearance, Rakesly Rivertown, was still betting the field to win against number seven. And a still more mysterious gambler, working through agents, was betting on number seven to place, but not to win. These latter bets were quickly covered. Number seven would win, unless some terrible calamity overtook that entry; and, in the case of such terrible calamity, number seven would not finish second, would not finish at all most likely.

The seven intrepid racers were off on their final, mad, twenty-mile circuit. Interest was high, especially with moneyed gamblers who followed the riders from the grandstand with their binoculars. At no place was the winding, circuit course more than four miles from the grandstand; and there were only three or four places, not more than three hundred yards in all, where the racers were out of sight of the higher tiers of the grandstand. One of those places was where Little Egg Creek went through Little Egg Meadow. Something mysterious happened near Little Egg Creek Crossing that neither the libretto nor the enacted drama itself makes clear.

Hubert Saint Nicholas, riding the French bicyclette, number seven, the Supreme, with the rear-wheel drive and the mechanical advantage, was unsaddled from his mount and knocked unconscious. The race master later and officially entered this incident as "A careless rider knocked off his bicycle by a tree branch," though Hubert swore that there wasn't a tree branch within a hundred yards of that place.

"I was slugged by a lurker in the weeds," Hubert said. "It was a criminal and fraudulent assault and I know who did it." Then he cried, "Oh, the perfidy of women!" This latter seemed to be an unconnected

outcry; perhaps Hubert had suffered a concussion.

Fortunately (for whom?) the alternate rider for number seven, the Mysterious (though duly certified) Masked Rider, was in the vicinity of the accident and took control of the bicyclette, the Supreme, and continued the race. But number seven, though having a one-minute lead ere the race began, did not win. Number seven did come in second though in total elapsed time.

The Great Bicycle Race is a quaint little drama, with not much plot, but with a pleasant and bucolic atmosphere that grows more pleasant every time the drama is played back. It is a thoroughly enjoyable "Journey into Summertime".

And there were a few more seconds of those intrusive "ghost" voices breaking into the closing moments of the pastoral drama.

"Clarie, I have been took bad, for a big wad, and I don't know how it happened. There is something funny about it all. There was something funny and familiar about that Masked Alternate Rider for number seven. (I swear that I know him from somewhere!) And there has always been something double funny and familiar about that gambler Rakesly Rivertown. [I swear and be damned if I don't know him from somewhere!]"

"Don't worry about it, Aurie. You are so smart that you will have all that money made back in no time at all."

"Yes, that's true, I will. But how can I write and produce and direct a drama and then get taken in it and not know what happened?"

"Don't worry about it, Aurie."

I myself doubt very much whether Aurelian Bentley knew about the "slow sounds" from nowhere-town that sometimes broke into the playing of his dramas, much less the "slow smells" which now began to give the dramas a character all their own.

4. The Voyages of Captain Cook was the fourth of the Bentley-produced television dramas of the year 1873. In this, Clarinda Calliope played the role of Maria Masina, the Queen of Polynesia. If The Great Bicycle Race was a journey into summertime, The Voyages of Captain Cook was a journey into tropical paradise.

Hubert Saint Nicholas played Captain Cook. Inspiro Spectraiski (Is he a Man? Is he a Fish?) played the Shark God. Leslie Whitemansion played the Missionary. X. Paul McCoffin played the Volcano God. Torres Malgre

played the God of the Walking Dead. Jaime del Diablo played Kokomoko, the bronzed surf boy and lover boy who was always holding a huge red hibiscus bloom between his white teeth.

The people of the South Sea Islands of the Captain Cook drama were always eating possum and sweet potatoes and fried chicken (a misconception) and twanging on little banjos (another misconception) and talking southern U.S. Ducky Dialect (but these ghost voices were not intended to be heard on the television presentation).

The complete libretto for *The Voyages of Captain Cook* has survived, which makes us grateful for those that have not survived for several of the dramas. The story is replete. It is better to disregard the libretto with its simultaneous curses invoked by the Shark God, the Volcano God, and the God of the Walking Dead, and to give oneself over to the charm of the scenery, which is remarkable, considering that it was all “filmed”, or “selenium-matrixed”, in the salt swamps of New Jersey.

The anomalous intrusive voices are in this drama again, as they will be in all the subsequent dramas.

“A ‘South Sea Bubble’, yes, that’s what I want, Aurie, one that can’t burst. Use your imagination [you have so very much of it] and your finances [you have so very much of those] and come up with something that will delight me.”

“I swear to you, Clarie, as soon as my finances are in a little better order, I will buy any island or group of islands in the Pacific Ocean for you. Do you hear me, Clarie? I will give you any island or group you wish, Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji. Name it and it is yours.”

“So many things you promise! But you don’t promise them on paper, only on air. Maybe I will find a way to make the air retain the promises you make.”

“Not on paper, not on air, Clarie, but in real life. I will make you the real and living Queen of Polynesia.”

The essence of the South Sea appeal is just plain charm. It may be that this Bentley drama, *The Voyages of Captain Cook*, was the original charm bush whence many things bloomed. No, in things of this sort, it is not necessary that a scion ever be in contact with its source or even know its source. Without the Voyages would there ever have been a Sadie Thompson, would there have been a Nellie Forbush? Would there have been a Nina, daughter of Almayer? Well, they wouldn’t have been as they

were if Clarinda Calliope hadn't, in a way, played them first. Would there have been a White Shadows of the South Seas if there hadn't first been The Voyages of Captain Cook? No, of course there wouldn't have been.

5. Crimean Days was the fifth of the Aurelian Bentley television dramas. In this, the multitalented Clarinda Calliope played the role of Florence Nightingale, of Ekmek Kaya, a Turkish lady of doubtful virtue who was the number-four wife and current favorite of the Turkish admiral, of Chiara Maldonado, a young lady camp follower with the army of Savoy, of Katya Petrova, who was a Russian princess as well as a triple spy, and of Claudette Boudin, a French lady journalist. Clarinda also masqueraded as Claudette's twin brother Claude, a colonel with the French forces, and as such she led the French to a surprising victory over the Russians at Eupatoria. The unmasqueraded Claude himself was played by Apollo Mont-de-Marsan, a young actor making his first appearance in the Bentley dramas.

The Crimean War was the last war in which the field officers of all sides (Leslie Whitemansion was a British field officer, Kirbac Fouet was a French, Jaime del Diablo was an officer of the forces of Savoy, Torres Malgre was the Turkish admiral, Inspiro Spectralski was a general of the Czar, X. Paul McCoffin was a special observer of the Pope), after their days of tactical maneuver and sometimes bloody conflict, would dress for dinner and have formal dinner together. And it was at these dinners that Clarinda Calliope, in her various guises, shone.

There was a wonderful and many-leveled table intrigue, and I believe that more and more of it will come through every time the drama is replayed. And it was here in this drama that one of the most strange of the Bentley-effect phenomena first appeared. There is unmistakable evidence that some of the subvocalizations (thoughts) of the people were now to be heard as "slow sound", which was really selenium-triggered "slow thought". Some of these manifestations were the role thoughts of the actors so strangely vocalized (Clarinda Calliope, for instance, could not speak or think in any tongues except English and her own Pennsylvania Dutch in normal circumstances: but in her triple spy roles we find her thinking out loud in Turkish and Greek and Russian); and other of the vocalizations are the real thoughts of the actors (the amazingly frank intentions of Leslie Whitemansion and of the new Apollo Mont-de-Marsan as to their lady loves of the evening after they should

have received their two-dollar actors' fee for the day).

It was a wonderful play and too intricate to be described. This one, above all, has to be seen. But again there was the anomalous intrusion of voices that were not a part of the scenes of the play: "Get rid of that Greek Wop kid, Clarie. I told him he was fired, and he said that he would stick around and work for nothing. He said he loved the fringe benefits. What are fringe benefits? I told him I'd run him off, and he said that this was the free state of New Jersey and that no one would run him off. I won't have him around."

"Oh, Aurie, there isn't any Greek Wop kid. That was me playing that role too. Am I not talented to play so many roles? And you will not fire me from this role. I will continue to play it, and I will be paid for it. It isn't the principle of the thing either: it's the two dollars."

"Yes, I understand that much about you. But you say that was you playing the part of that smart-mouth Apollo Dago Greek? That couldn't be. I've seen you both at the same time. I've seen you two together too many times. I've seen you smooching each other."

"Ah, Aurie, that was quite an advanced technique and illusion, not to mention double exposure, that I used there. What other actress could play both roles at once and get away with it?"

"Your techniques and illusions are becoming a little bit too advanced, Clarie. And do not be so sure that you are getting away with it."

All through Crimean Days, there was some tampering with history going on for dramatic effect. The Light Brigade, for instance, was successful in its famous charge and it won a great victory. But the final outcome of the war was left in doubt. Aurelian Bentley had somehow become a strong partisan of the Russians and he refused to show them being finally defeated by the allies.

6. Ruddy Limbs and Flaming Hair is the sixth of the Bentley television dramas. In this piece, the dramatic Clarinda Calliope plays the part of Muothu, the Maid of Mars, for the Ruddy Limbs and Flaming Hair are on the planet itself. There are some fantastic elements in this piece, as well as amazing scientific accuracy. There is, in fact, a technical precocity that is really stunning. Aurelian Bentley has foreseen circumstances that even the scientific community did not then see, and he has dealt with those circumstances.

He posits, for instance, an atmosphere composed mostly of an

enomagnetized, digammated, attenuated form of oxygen. Being enomagnetized, that atmosphere would naturally cling to its planet even though the gravity would not be strong enough to retain it otherwise. Being digammated, it would produce no line in the Martian spectrum, would have no corona or optical distortion effect, and could in no way be detected from Earth. And yet a human Earthly would be able to breathe it freely.

This was a good-natured utopian drama of total realization and happiness. The Ruddy Limbs and Flaming Hair apply both allegorically to the planet Mars and literally to the highly dramatic Clarinda Calliope as Muothu. Muothu displayed rather more of the ruddy limbs than were ordinarily shown on Earth, but it was explained that customs on Mars were different.

Ruddy Limbs and Flaming Hair was the last of the dramas in which the apparently tormented and disturbed Aurelian Bentley still showed the strong hand of the master as scenarist, dramaturgist, director, and producer generally. After this we come to the four “Trough of the Wave” dramas, and then the three bewildering and hectic displays on the end of the series.

7. The Trenton Train Robbery is the seventh of the Bentley television dramas, and the first of the four “Trough” plays where Aurelian Bentley and his effects are sunken in the slough of despond and have lost their brightness and liveliness and hope. We will pass through them quickly.

In the Train Robbery, the peerless Clarinda Calliope plays Roxana Roundhouse, the daughter of the slain locomotive engineer Timothy (Trainman) Roundhouse. Armed with a repeating rifle, a repeating shotgun, a repeating pistol, and a few pocket-sized bombs, Roxana rides the rods of the crack Trenton Express in the effort to catch or kill the murderers of her father. These murderers have sworn that they will rob that very Trenton Express again.

And Roxana Roundhouse does catch or kill all the murderers of her father. In spite of some good shots of landscapes rushing by, this is not one of Aurelian Bentley’s best efforts.

And again the voices of unknown persons creep into the drama:

“You’ve already flayed me, Clarie, and scraped both sides of my pelt for whatever might cling to it. What more do you want from me? Go away with your lover and leave me alone.” And then in a fuzzier voice



(apparently the “thought voice” made vocal) the same person said or thought: “Oh, if only she would go away from me, then I might have a chance! For I will never be able to go away from her.”

“Grow more skin, Aurie,” the other voice said. “I’m not nearly finished fleecing you and flaying you. Oh, don’t look so torn up, Aurie. You know I could never love anyone except you. But a little token of our love is required now and then, and especially now, today. Yes, I know you are going to use you old line, ‘I gave you a million dollars last week,’ but Aurie, that was last week. Yes, I know that you have expenses that the world wots not of. So do I. Believe me, Aurie, I wouldn’t ask for these tokens of affection if I didn’t want them.” And then in a fuzzier voice, a “thought voice”, the same person said or thought: “I’ll never get another fish like this one and I sure can’t afford to lose him. But gentle handling doesn’t get it all the time. When the hook in him shows signs of working loose a bit, it has to be set in again with a very hard jerk on the line.”

8. *Six Guns on the Border* is the eighth of the Bentley television dramas. In this drama, Clarinda Calliope (is there no end to her versatility?) plays the part of Conchita Allegre, the half-breed Apache and Mexican girl, on the Arizona border during the Mexican War. Conchita hates the American soldiers who are invading that area. She has them come to her secretly, with promises of love, and then she has them ambushed and killed. She kills many of them herself with her own six gun, and she makes antimacassars out of their skins. The sort of gentlemen that Conchita really likes use a lot of oil on their hair so Conchita needs a lot of antimacassars at her house.

But there are a few of the American officers so awkward and oafish that Conchita simply can’t stand to have much to do with them, not even long enough to seduce them and have them killed. These horrible specimens are: Captain James Polk (played by Leslie Whitemansion).

General Zachary Taylor (played by Kirbac Fouet).

Captain Millard Fillmore (played by X. Paul McCoffin).

Captain Franklin Pierce (played by Jaime del Diablo).

Captain James Buchanan (played by Torres Malgre).

Captain Abraham Lincoln (played by Inspiro Spectralski).

Captain Andrew Johnson (played by Apollo Mont-de-Marsan).

Captain Sam Grant (played by Hubert Saint Nicholas).

There was a lot of historical irony in this play, but maybe it belonged

somewhere else.

There was a lot of “Comedy of Manners” stuff in it but it falls a little flat, mostly because the eight oafish officers spared by Conchita were too unmannerly to be in a comedy of manners.

Aurelian Bentley came near the bottom of his form in this piece. But for the energy of Clarinda Calliope (she played five other parts besides that of Conchita) there would have been hardly any drama at all.

And, as always, there were those intrusive voices hovering over the playbacks.

“Claire, believe me! Believe me! Believe me! I will do all these things for you. I promise it.”

“Yes, you promise it to the earless walls and to the earless me. Promise it to the pen and ink and paper here.”

“Get rid of that Apollo kid first, Clarie.”

“You get rid of him. You have a lot of rough-looking men around.”

9. Clarence Greenback, Confidence Man was the ninth of the Aurelian Bentley television dramas. Hubert Saint Nicholas played the role of Clarence Greenback, the casino owner. It was the first time that Clarinda Calliope had not played the lead role in a drama. Is it possible that Clarinda had somehow slipped? Or was this another instance of the left lobe of Aurelian Bentley having lost its cunning, and casting badly. The talented prestidigitator of drama did not have his sure touch nowadays. Oh sure, Clarinda played other roles in the drama, but she did not have the lead role.

Clarinda played the role of Gretchen, the sweep-out girl at the casino. She played the role of Maria, the mounting-block girl in the street outside the casino. She played the role of Elsie, the chimney-sweep girl. She played the part of Hennchen, the scullery maid in the third and vilest kitchen of the casino. She played the part of Josephine, the retriever who had to gather up the shattered bodies of the suicides below Suicide Leap Window of the casino and take them to East Potters’ Field and dig their graves and bury them. Elsie made a good thing out of her job, from the gold teeth of the late patrons of the casino, but the dramatist and producer did not know about the good thing she had there.

There were hazards in all these different roles.

“No, of course we can’t put out the fires for you to clean the chimneys,” said Leslie Whitemansion, who was in charge of fireplaces

and chimneys at the casino. "Clean them hot." And it was very hot working inside those tall chimneys with the fires roaring below, and Elsie the chimney-sweep girl suffered.

For keeping a copper coin that she found while sweeping out the casino, the sadist Baron von Steichen (played by X. Paul McCoffin) had Gretchen hung up by her thumbs and flogged.

And Maria, the mounting-block girl, who had to stand in the muddy street outside the casino and bend her back for the gentlemen to step on her when they mounted or dismounted their horses, she had it worse on the muddy days. Oh, the great muddy boots of those men! Maybe they're trying to tell me something," Clarinda Calliope spoke or thought (by slow talk-thought). "I do like subtle people." But a good actress can play any role, and Clarinda has her revenge today. Hardly anyone remembers the plot for Clarence Greenback, Confidence Man, but everyone remembers the tribulations of those pretty little servant girls.

And then there were those other intrusive voices of the overlay. It was almost as if they belonged in another sort of drama.

"Clarie, this has to stop. Not counting the special gifts, and they're fantastic, I'm giving you ten times as much as the President of the United States is making."

"I'm ten times as good at acting as he is. And how about my special gifts? - and they're fantastic. Why do you have all the private detectives running around the last couple of days? To spy on me?"

"To spy on everything and everyone. To save my life. Frankly, Clarie, I am afraid of being murdered. I have premonitions of being killed, with a knife, always with a knife."

"Like in *Thirsty Daggers*, a Murder Mystery? That one wasn't really very well worked out, and I believe it's one of the things bothering you. Your undermind is looking for a better solution, I believe, for a neater murder. It is seeking to enact a more artistic murder. I believe it will do it. I believe you will come up with quite an artistic murder for yourself. There are good murders and bad murders, you see."

"Clarie, I don't intend to let myself be killed at all, not by either a good or a bad murder."

"Not even for art's sake? It seems it would be worth it, for the perfect murder, Aurie."

"Not when I'm the murdered one, Clarie."

Then, a moment later, the female person said or thought something further, in a “slow thought-voice”.

“Sometimes persons have perfection thrust upon them in spite of themselves. An artful murder for Aurie would make up for a lot of the mad art that he’s been guilty of lately.”

10. The Vampires of Varuma was the tenth of the Aurelian Bentley television dramas. This is the fourth and last of the “Trough of the Wave” dramas, which show Bentley’s dramatic powers in almost complete decline and himself mightily disoriented. Yet, in this bottoming-out, there is a curious resurrection of his powers in a slightly different form. His sense of plotting and story movement did not return yet, but his sense of dramatic horror as motive force was resurrected to its highest pitch.

Clarinda Calliope played Magda the peasant maid, Miss Cheryl Somerset, the governess from England, and the Princess Irene of Transylvania. All three of these had been traveling to Castle Khubav on rational errands by the regular coach of the road; and each of the three had seen all the other passengers dismount hastily, and had then experienced the coach horses being whipped ahead frantically by an invisible coachman, or by no coachman at all. And each of these ladies had arrived, on successive days, in the apparently driverless coach, not at Castle Khubav, but at the dread Castle Beden. And inside the Castle Beden were the seven (“no, not seven, eight” was written into the libretto in a weirdly different hand) insane counts in their castle of evil. These were: Count Vlad mel, played by Leslie Whitemansion.

Count Igork, played by Kirbac Fouet.

Count Lascar, played by X. Paul McCoffin.

Count Chort, played by Jaime del Diablo.

Count Sangressuga, played by Torres Malgre.

Count Letuchaya, played by Inspiro Spectralski (Is he a Man? Is he a Bat?) Count Ulv, played by Hubert Saint Nicholas.

And then there is another one added in the libretto in that weirdly different hand: Count Prividenne, played by Apollo Mont-de-Marsan.

There is a slip-up here somewhere. Apollo is supposed to have been “gotten rid of”, to have shuffled off the mortal coil, and the sheriff’s report said that he died of indigestion. But if Apollo has not been “gotten rid of” then certainly money was paid in vain.

The seven (or eight) evil counts are sometimes conventional counts in

evening clothes and monocles. And sometimes they are huge batwinged creatures flitting ponderously down the lightning-lit corridors of Castle Beden. The castle, in fact, is the main character in the drama. It does not have formal lighting, as it is lit by lightning all twenty-four hours of every night (there is no daylight at Castle Beden). The floors and walls howl and chains rattle constantly. The counts have sometimes conventional six-inch-long eyeteeth, and then suddenly they will have hollow fangs eighteen inches long and deadly. And there is a constant lot of howling and screaming for what is supposed to be a silent television drama.

A flying count will suddenly fold his bat wings and land on the broad bosom of one of the three maidens and have into her throat with his terrible blood-sucking fangs. And every time it happens, there is a horrible flopping and screeching.

The voice of Clarinda Calliope is heard loud and clear and real in a slow angry sound.

“Dammit, Aurelian, that’s real blood they’re taking out of my throat.”

And came the suave voice of the master dramatist Aurelian Bentley (but the voices shouldn’t be breaking in like this): “Right, Clarie. It is on such verisimilitude that I have built my reputation as a master.”

Clarinda, in her three roles, seemed to lose quite a bit of blood as the drama went on, and she fell down more and more often. And the drama was a howling and bloody success, no matter that the story line was shattered in a thousand pieces — for each piece of it was like a writhing blood snake that gluts and gloats.

And then, after the drama itself was ended in a spate of final blood, there came those intrusive voices that seemed to be out of some private drama.

“Aurie, if you are worrying about being killed, how about providing for me before it happens?”

“I leave you half of my kingdom, ah, estate, Clarie, right off the top of it. My word is good for this. And stop falling down.”

“I’m weak. It took a lot out of me. Yes, your written word is good on this, Aurie, if it is written and attested to in all the right places. Let’s take care of that little detail right now.”

“Clarie, my spoken promise is enough, and it is all that I will give. I hereby attest that half of my estate, off the top, belongs to you. Let the eared walls of this room be witnesses to what I say, Clarie. If the walls of

this room will swear to it, then surely they will be believed. Now don't bother me for a few days. I will be busy with something else. And stop falling down. It's annoying."

The female person then said or thought something in a fuzzy thought-voice: "Yes, I believe I can make the walls of this room attest for me when the time comes. (I might have to put in another amplifying circuit to be sure.) And I believe that the attesting walls will be believed."

The male person then said or thought something in a fuzzy thought-voice: "I have Miss Adeline Addams now. Why should I care about this Calliope clown? It's irritating the way she keeps turning chalk-white and falling down. I never saw anyone make such a fuss over nine quarts of blood. But now Lam on a new and more glorious dawn road. Is it not peculiar how a man will fall in love with one woman and out of love with another one at the same time?"

11. The Ghost at the Opera is the eleventh of the Aurelian Bentley television dramas in the year 1873. The Ghost is based on Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, but Bentley's production is quite original for all that. The role of Leonora is played by Miss Adeline Addams. But the same role is also played by Clarinda Calliope, who was originally selected to play the role by herself. This business of having two different persons playing the same role creates a certain duality, one might almost say a certain duplicity, in the drama.

The "Ghost" is the doubling: it is the inept and stumbling Clarinda trying again and again to sing parts of the Leonora role and falling in it totally and being jerked off stage by the stage manager's crook; and it is the beautiful and brimming genius Adeline Addams coming on and performing the same role brilliantly. This provides the "cruel comedy" that is usually lacking in Verdi; for, without cruelty, only a limited success is ever possible in opera. But Clarinda took some very bad falls from the stageman's crook jerking her off her feet, and besides she was still weak and falling down from all the blood she had lost in her roles in *The Vampires of Varuma*. She was suffering.

"Why do you go through with it, Clarinda?" Hubert Saint Nicholas asked her once in an outside-of-the-play-itself voice. "Why do you allow yourself to be tortured and humiliated like that?"

"Only for the money," Clarinda was heard to say. "Only for the actor's fee of four dollars a day. I am clear broke and I am hungry. But if I can

stick it out to the end of the opera, I will have four dollars tonight for my wages.”

“Four dollars, Clarinda? The rest of us get only two dollars a day. Are you playing another role that I don’t know about?”

“Yes, I am also playing the role of Wilhelmina, the outhouse cleaner.”

“But I thought that you had millions from that old tyrant, Clarinda.”

“It’s gone, Hubie, all gone. I had expenses that the world wotted not of. I gave Apollo most of the money when I was in love with him. And I gave the rest of it today to do a special favor for me.”

“You gave the money to him today? But he was buried yesterday.”

“Time seems to go faster as we get older, doesn’t it?”

Meanwhile, back on the opera stage, a new Verdi was being hammered out. Leslie Whitemansion was playing Manrico. X. Paul McCoffin was playing Ferrando. Hubert Saint Nicholas was playing Count di Luni. Apollo Mont-de-Marsan was playing the ghost. But was there a ghost in the libretto besides the double ghost of the two females playing the same role? Yes, there was; there was a real ghost in the libretto. It was written in there in a queer “other” hand, really a “ghostly” hand, and it wrote that Apollo was playing the role of the ghost.

So the merry comic opera went along almost to its end. It was just when Manrico was being led to the executioner’s block and the evil Count di Luni was gloating in triumph, when everything was finally being shaped up in that drama that had some pleasure for everybody, that a horrible thing happened in one of the loges or boxes that overhung the stage.

Aurelian Bentley was knifed there in his box at the opera. Oh God, this was murder! “Your mind is looking for a better solution, I believe, for a neater murder.” Oh, that had been the voice of another sort of ghost. But now, to be slain by the ghost of a man dead only a day or two, and in the presence of several thousands of persons here! (For it was, possibly, none other than Apollo Mont-de-Marsan, who had been “gotten rid of”, who was getting rid of Aurelian Bentley.) And again:

“There are good murders and bad murders, you see.... It seems it would be worth it, for art’s sake, for the perfect murder.” Aurelian Bentley was stabbed to death in his box at the opera there, but even he had to admit, with some appreciation, as he went, that it was done with art.

And immediately, as the opera on stage came to its great conclusion,

there welled up cries of “Author, Author, Bentley, Bentley!”

Then the dying (or more likely dead) man rose for the last time, bowed formally, and tumbled out of his box and onto his face on the stage, stark dead, and with the thirsty (now slaked) dagger twinkling between the blades of his shoulders.

What other man had ever made such an exit from or on life’s stage! That was Theater! That was Drama!

12. An Evening in Newport was intended to be the twelfth of the Bentley television dramas. But it was never produced; possibly because of the death of its producer. It exists only as a libretto.

There was a high society “drama of manners”, as Miss Adeline Addams knew it, as Aurelian Bentley with his quick mind and quick mimicry knew it from his brief brushes with it. But does not a drama or comedy of manners depend largely on the quip and the arch aphorism? How could it be done in silent presentation?

By art, that’s how it might be done: by the perfect art of the silent mimes, and Aurelian Bentley was master of that art. By the gestures, by the facial implications, by great silent acting this might be done. Was there any devastating riposte that she could not give with her autocratic hands? It was never tested, but Aurelian believed that she was pretty good.

On the lower level, An Evening in Newport was a one-sided dual between Mistress Adeline Addams of Newport, playing the role of Mistress Adela Adams of Newport, and Clarinda Calliope, playing the role of Rosaleen O’Keene, a low, vicious, ignorant, filthy, bad-mannered, fifth parlor maid newly arrived from Ireland. It was a stacked set in favor of Adeline/Adela.

On the higher level, the drama was the passionate portrayal of the total love of a beautiful and wealthy and intelligent and charming and aristocratic young lady (Adeline-Adela) for a man of surpassing genius and ineffable charm, a man of poise and power and heroic gifts, a man the like of whom will hardly appear once in a century. The drama was supposed to take on a note of hushed wonder whenever this man was mentioned, or so the libretto said. The libretto does not identify this exceptional man, but our own opinion is that the librettist, Aurelian Bentley, intended this hardly-once-in-a-century man, the object of the torrid and devoted love of Miss Adeline Addams, to be himself, Aurelian



Bentley.

But *An Evening in Newport*, intended to be the surpassing climax of that first and still unsurpassed television series, was never produced.

13. *Pettifoggers of Philadelphia* is the noncanonical, apocryphal, thirteenth apocalypse of *The Wonderful World of Aurelian Bentley*, that first and greatest television series. There is no libretto to it. There is no formal production, and it does not carry the Bentley "Seal of Production". But it does repose in one of the old television receivers, the one that was Aurelian's own control receiver, the one that was in Aurelian's own luxurious den where he spent so many hectic hours with Clarinda Calliope and later with Adeline Addams. It reposes there, and it may be seen and heard there.

Though Bentley was already dead when these scenes were ordered and live-presented, yet he walks in them and talks in them. The experience of hearing the thoughts and words of a hovering dead man spoken out loud and of seeing him as if in the flesh is a shattering but dramatic one.

The setting and sole scene of *Pettifoggers of Philadelphia* is that same luxurious den of Aurelian Bentley's, first placed under court seal, but then opened for a meeting which, as one of the parties to it stated, could not validly be held anywhere else. A probate judge was present, and pettifoggers representing several of the parties, and two of the parties themselves. It was a hearing on the disposition of the estate of Aurelian Bentley, of what might be left of that estate, he having died without having made a will. But one of the parties, Clarinda Calliope, insisted that Bentley had made a will, that the will was in this particular room and no other, that the will in fact was this room and the eared and tongued walls of it.

There seemed to be several meetings in this room superimposed on one another, and they cannot be sorted out. To sort them out would have been to destroy their effect, however, for they achieved syntheses of their several aspects and became the true meeting that never really took place but which contained all the other meetings in one theatrical unity.

The pettifogger of a second cousin once removed was there to present the claim of that distant person, as next in kin, to the estate of Aurelian Bentley.

The pettifogger of Adeline Addams of Newport was there to present

the claim of Adeline to the estate, claims based on an irrefutable promise. This irrefutable promise was the marriage license for Aurelian Bentley and Adeline Addams. It was not signed or witnessed, of course. The marriage, the pettifogger said, had been scheduled to take place on a certain night after the presentation of an opera, that was contained in a television drama, that was contained in a riddle. But Aurelian Bentley had been killed during that opera, which voided the prospect of marriage, but he did not void the promise.

There were pettifoggers there for the different creditors. And all the pettifoggers were from Philadelphia.

And there was Clarinda Calliope representing herself (as Portia, she insisted, and not as a pettifogger), and she claimed rights by a promise too big and too intricate to be put on paper.

There was the probate judge of the private hearing who ambled around the luxurious den flipping a silver dollar in the air and humming the McGinty's Saloon Waltz.

"Oh, stop flipping that silly silver dollar and get on with the matter of the probate," Miss Adeline Addams complained to that nitwit judge.

"The silver dollar is the matter of the probate," the judge said. "The dollar is important. It is the soul and body of what this is all about."

The piles of paper began to accumulate on the tables there. There were the documents and attestations of the distant next of kin, of Adeline Addams, and of the creditors in their severality. And not one scrap of paper did Clarinda Calliope put forward.

"Enough, enough," said the judge after the flood of paper had narrowed down to a trickle. "Stop the paper," but he didn't stop flipping that silver dollar or humming that McGinty's Saloon Waltz. "All a-sea that's going a-sea, Miss Calliope, it is time you laid a little evidence on the table if you are to be a party to these hearings."

"My evidence is too large and too living to lay on the table," Clarinda said. "But listen, and perhaps look'. Due to the magic of the selenium 'slow response' principle, and to the walls of this very room being wired parallel to the receiver in this room, we may be able to bring to you a veritable reconstruction of past words and avowals and persons."

And pretty soon the voice of the once-in-a-century man began, ghostly at first, and then gradually taking on flesh.

"Oh, Aurelian!" Adeline Addams squealed. "Where are you?"

“He is here present, in this room where he spent so many wonderful hours with me,” Clarinda said. “All right, Aurie baby, talk a little bit clearer and start materializing.”

“All these things I will give you, Claire,” came the voice of Aurelian Bentley, and Bentley was there in shadow form of himself. “No one else would give you so much. No one else would ever care so much... trust me, Claire.”

Aurelian Bentley was standing there solidly now. It was a three-dimensional projection or re-creation of him, coming into focus from all the eared and eyed and remembering walls of the room that was wired in parallel to the television receiver. Aurelian stood in the midst of them there in his own luxurious den.

“Claire, I will do handsomely by you... a million dollars, my love, and I will give it to you.” Oh, these were startling and convincing words coming from the living ghost there! “I swear to you, Claire... I will buy any island or group of islands in the Pacific Ocean for you... Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji. Name it and it’s yours.”

What man ever made such tall promises and with such obvious sincerity?

“Not on paper, not on air, Claire, but in real life. I will make you the real and living queen.”

If they will not listen to one risen from the dead, whom will they listen to?

“Claire, believe me, believe me, believe me! I will do all things for you. I promise it.” How are you going to top something like that?

“I leave you... my kingdom, ah, estate, Claire. My word is good for that.”

It was all in the bag, and the drawstring was being tightened on the bag.

“I hereby attest that... my estate... belongs to you. Let the eared walls of this room be witnesses to what I say, Claire. If the walls of this room will swear to it, then surely they will be believed.”

The image of Aurelian Bentley disappeared, and his sound was extinguished with a sharp snipping sound. Adeline Addams was putting a scissors back into her handbag.

“I’ve meant to find out what wire there was for several times,” she said. “That sort of shuts it all off when the wire is cut, doesn’t it?”

“Here, here, you are guilty of destroying my evidence,” Clarinda Calliope said. “You can go to prison for that! You can burn in fire for that!”

A sudden flaming hay wagon with a wild woman driving it rushed into the room and seemed about to destroy everyone in the room. Everyone cringed from it except Clarinda and the probate judge. The flaming hay wagon did crash into all the people of the room, but it did them no damage. It was only a scene from one of the earlier plays. You didn’t think that Clarinda had only one circuit in that room, did you? But several of the persons were shaken by the threat.

“Good show,” said the probate judge. “I guess it wins, what there is left to win.”

“No, no,” Adeline cried. “You can’t give her the estate?”

“What’s left of it, sure,” said the judge, still flipping the silver dollar.

“It isn’t the principle either,” said Clarinda, “it’s the dollar.” She plucked the silver dollar out of the air as the probate judge was still flipping it.

“This is the entire residue of the estate, isn’t it?” she asked to be sure.

“Right, Calliope, right,” the judge said. “That’s all that was left of it.”

He continued to flip an invisible coin into the air, and he whistled the last, sad bars of the McGinty’s Saloon Waltz.

“Anybody know where a good actress can get a job?” Clarinda asked. “Going rates, two dollars a day per role.” She swept out of the room with head and spirits high. She was a consummate actress.

The other persons fade out into indistinct sounds and indistinct shadows mt he old kerosene-powered television receiver.

The prospects of retrieval and revival of the first and greatest of all television series, *The Wonderful World of Aurelian Bentley*, recorded and produced in the year 1873, is in grave danger.

The only true and complete versions of the series reposes in one single television receiver. Aurelian Bentley’s own control receiver, the one that he kept in his own luxurious den where he spent so many happy hours with his ladies. The original librettos are stored in this set: they are, in fact, a part of this set and they may not, for inexplicable reasons, be removed to any great distance from it.

All the deep and ever-growing side talk, “slow talk”, is in this set (All the other sets are mute.) All the final drama *Pettifoggers of Philadelphia*

is recorded on this set and is in none of the others. There is a whole golden era of television recorded in this set. I bought this old kerosene-burning treasure from its last owner (he did not know what it was: I told him that it was a chestnut roaster) for eighteen dollars. Now, by a vexing coincidence, this last owner has inherited forty acres of land with a fine stand of chestnut trees, and he wants the chestnut roaster back. And he has the law on his side.

I bought it from him, and I paid him for it, of course. But the check I gave him for it was hotter than a selenium rectifier on a shorted circuit.

I have to make up the eighteen dollars or lose the receiver and its stored wealth.

I have raised thirteen dollars and fifty cents from three friends and one enemy. I still need four dollars and a half. Oh wait, wait, here is ninety-eight cents in pennies brought in by the "Children for the Wonderful World of Aurelian Bentley Preservation Fund". I still need three dollars and fifty-two cents. Anyone wishing to contribute to this fund had best do so quickly before this golden era of television is lost forever. Due to the fussiness of the government, contributions are not tax-deductible.

It is worth preserving as a remnant of that early era when there were giants on the earth. And, if it is preserved, someday someone will gaze into the old kerosene-powered receiver and cry out in astonishment in the words of the Greatest Bard:

"-what poet-race Shot such Cyclopean arches at the stars?"

## SPLINTERS

The three town-and-country men kept loose hours, so it was just one o'clock in the morning when they began to talk of going fishing at once.

"It would help if we knew what the weather would be for the next few hours," Charles Penstock said. "If it will be fog, we can go and jug for bullhead catfish on Silly Ghost Cove on Keystone Lake. If it will clear to a quick frost, we can drag for walleyes on Tenkiller. Or we can dynamite for pond pickerel on Oolagab."

"If it is heavy dew, we can spear frogs on Euchie," Ed Rivet said. "What did the weatherman give on the evening news?"

"He gave predictions that are now three hours old," Otto Pankration said. "That's too old. We'll just have the weatherman up and see what he says now. He might be intuitive and hit it sharp if we get him out of his sleep."

"What are you going to do, Otto, phone Voiles and wake him up?" Penstock asked.

"More than wake him up, I'll bring him here. Ah yes, nl bring him here," Otto said calmly. But Otto was shaking in a nervous sort of passion. That meant — well, it meant that he was being excessively Ottoish. Penstock and Rivet looked at each other.

Oh, oh! they thought, almost audibly and almost in concert. Here we go again with a stammer! How can Otto outdo Otto tonight?

Otto Pankration was sometimes an imposinman, and that was his public reputation. But sometimes he was a dubious venture of a fellow. The latter was most often the case when he was with his cronies Penstock and Rivet.

"So bring the weatherman here then, Otto," Penstock said.

"Ah yes, well, you see this high-voltage assembly here —" Otto began.

"The one by which you call spirits from the vasty deeps, as you said the night before last?" Ed Rivet asked. "It is impressive and expensive-looking, yes, and you should be able to use it as a prop for some good illusions. But it looks like an electric furnace to me, and not a high-voltage assembly at all."

"It looks like it, and it isn't," Otto answered. "Well then, to the business at hand." He turned on the mechanism that looked like an electric furnace and wasn't. It didn't spark, it didn't fiasch. It growled and

hummed a little bit. That was all.

And a man was standing there, bare-shanked and angry, and apparently just tumbled out of his sleep. All right, pretend to be unimpressed! Pretend to be blasé about it all. A man had materialized in the room right there! Otto had outdone Otto again tonight. Whether or not the feat should come undone later, it was absolutely top stroke now.

The bare-shanked and angry and confused man was Hector Voiles, the most noteworthy of the local TV weatherpersons. Well, was Hector really there, or was he a projection? Or was he present and yet unsubstantial in some other way?

“How have you brought me here, Pankration?” Hector wheezed. “You could at least have let me put on pants.”

“Think ‘pants,’ Hector, and you will be wearing pants,” Otto blared. “Pants are the slightest of illusions at best. Now tell us what the weather will be for the coming hours.”

“But I haven’t the reports here, or the charts, or even the instruments.”

“You are yourself the instrument,” Otto said. “Be intuitive! Tell us what the weather will be. Then you can go back to bed.”

This wasn’t in Otto’s big home. That was sort of above them and around the corner. It wasn’t in Otto’s laboratory either. It was a small room, half underground, fitted out for the comfort of Otto and his cronies, and otherwise filled with a jumble of instruments and equipment that seemed to be out of present use. This was Otto’s Little Den. Or it was Little Otto’s Den.

“It is overcast and misty now,” Hector Voiles said. The light didn’t pick him out very well in that room, and indeed the room was poorly lighted. Or else they were all low-resolution persons tonight. “But it will clear within an hour, and then it will quick-frost. Quick-frost, yes, but only at ground level will it freeze. At instrument level it will not fall below thirty-seven degrees. And for a fortnight hence the weather will be good for idolons. Oh I wonder why I said that? I wonder what I meant?”

“Thank you, Voiles,” Otto Pankration said. “Quick-frost you said, and whatever else you said doesn’t matter. Leave now.”

“I don’t know how,” said Hector, the bare-shanked weatherman.

“Go the same way you came,” Otto said with a mean edge to his voice.

“I can’t. I don’t know how I came here,” said the suddenly shivering

Hector.

“Be intuitive. Divine a way,” Otto said. “Go from us now and go back to bed.”

Hector Voiles the weatherman became unsubstantial and unhinged. He unmaterialized, and he was gone. And Otto Pankration, Charles Penstock, and Ed Rivet loaded into Ed’s car to go to Oolagah Lake to dynamite for pond pickerel. The dynamiting goes so much more crisply when there comes a quick frost.

How would Otto outdo Otto on that one? Sluff it off if you can, but it had been a pretty good trick. Otto had materialized a known man against that man’s will. He may have used TV data to build the prospectus for a projection, but it was not a TV image that was projected. Hector Voiles did not appear bare-shanked and newly awakened and humbling on TV. Hector had been caught in the actual moment. He had been jerked out of his sleep and brought to Otto’s Little Den, or to Little Otto’s Den.

But it was hard in ordinary circumstances to think of Otto Pankration as a little man, for he was quite large.

What would Otto do for an encore now? How would he top the materialization of Hector Voiles?

Well, he didn’t really top it. It was already tops. What he did next was materialize two slightly more interesting people. One of these he materialized publicly, the public being those two cronies Charles Penstock and Ed Rivet. But the other one he materialized privately, for himself alone. He dipped the dipper for TV persons again.

“I am not restricted to them,” Otto explained, “but they are handy objects to sight on and to orient my equipment on. And, of course, I am still experimenting. I will grab and project TV persons, but I will not take them in their TV attitudes.”

He next took Barry McNary, that local TV pundit and all-points expert who was so filled with urbanity and scope and interest. He took Barry as he was in the early-morning hours (this was the following early morning), but he didn’t take him bare-shanked or bewildered.

Barry was there suddenly, in Little Otto’s Den, in a rich crimson dressing gown, and smoking an in-style pipe whose genuine aroma filled the cluttered room. You cannot fake an aroma like that. And Barry McNary brought his own setting with him when he came. He was in his own easy chair, reading a book of his own, with his own side table beside



him and his own midnight Tokay at hand. And he glanced at the three town-and-country men with absolute boredom. Then he continued his reading, not for effect, but because it was his pleasure. Little Otto might materialize Barry there, but there was no way that he could compel the interest of this pundit.

“Barry McNary, pundit and punko, you will answer questions for us now,” Otto said ponderously. “Aye, and you will do tricks, as I order you to do them. Do you know any reason that I am not able to order you to do tricks?”

“The reason is that I am not here,” Barry said, “and I have no knowledge of this romp, nor interest in it. Hound dogs, in some manner you have got hold of the equivalent of an old and discarded undershirt of mine to worry and toss. So worry it then, dogs! But it is long discarded, and I am not in it.”

Otto tried again and again to dominate Barry McNary, and he got nowhere. Barry would not answer at all, or he would answer demolishingly. Barry McNary was whipping Little Otto at every turn. A projection should not be able to whip its projector and constructor like that. Barry had a dangerous validity about him even though he said that he wasn't there. It was bad enough to be whipped by a commanded and controlled thing who didn't act as if he were controlled. It was even worse to be whipped by a mere shadow, or by a mere discarded undershirt. Then Barry McNary left him without being dismissed, and he refused to return.

Still and all, Otto had materialized a second known man, one of more moment than the first one, Hector Voiles. Who else in town was doing any authentic materializing at all? And, as Otto said, he was still experimenting with these new techniques.

Then Otto materialized still another TV person, Evangeline Aster, a real sparkler. He materialized Evangeline privately, telling no one about it, not even his two close cronies. Of course, he was proud to be able to materialize and summon and command such a sparkler as Evangeline, but the pleasure he wanted with her was private.

Otto brought Evangeline to him every night for a week. But it started a little slowly.

“The rule is that a person brought here by me must obey my every command,” Otto said at an early summons. “I made that rule, just as I

made you to come here.”

“Oh let’s just forget the whole thing,” Evangeline said. This was the second night of their encounter and Evangeline was in woolies, though she had been in scanties the first night, not expecting to be transported. “I really don’t like it here at all and I want to go back. Let me go.”

“You and I are going to have one of the great affairs of the century, Evangeline,” Otto said. “Now, to make up for lost time, I will force you to be in rapport with me.”

“Forced rapport is no rapport at all,” Evangeline said, like one reciting an axiom. “This isn’t like you, Mr. Pankration, and it surely isn’t like me.

“No. It isn’t like us. It is us,” Little Otto said. Wait a minute! Dr. Otto Pankration had the name of being a witty and interesting man. How do you square that with the Otto of these encounters?

But farther than that, Dr. Otto Pankration had the reputation Of being absolutely courteous, of being just as absolutely uninvolved, of being a man with no crudity in him at all. Moreover, he was completely faithful to the memory of his dead wife. But Otto-in-the-flesh here was the hot-breathing opposite of that.

And Evangeline Aster, that beautiful sparkler of a woman (she herself had coined the name “The TV Sparkler” for herself), she had always been a consummate comic. She was even that still more rare thing on the current scene, a clean comic, a comic with class (she also had coined that phrase for herself). Evangeline had style, she had probity, she had a husband on an important foreign mission at the moment.

(A comic with class? This baggage here?)

She had known Dr. Otto Pankration for five years. But -,he hadn’t at all known this Little Otto who had summoned her to these cluttered quarters here.

“I have a fine old name, one of the most respected of the ancient Dames of Europe — Pankration,” Little Otto said. “But it is really the name of a wrestle named ‘Rough and Tumble.’ Let us tumble now, Evangeline.”

“Oh let’s just forget the whole thing,” Evangeline said dully. How could this living sparkler seem so dull?

“You and I, Evangeline, we are to have one of the great affairs of the century,” Otto said again, “and I believe that we are falling a little bit behind schedule. Let’s pick up the pace and make up for lost time and

passion.”

So they did. They carried it through. And, for a week there, they had one of the great affairs of the century. NVell, maybe it was a bad century. And maybe the great affairs are pretty ordinary when they are stripped down.

After the fifth night, Evangeline stopped watching it.

She stopped watching it? But she was in it, wasn't she?

Evangeline Aster went to see Dr. Sigmund Izzersted. She was about to enter the great marble portals of his famous Coucherie when she heard the doctor call to her in a curious small voice.

“Oh Miss Aster, were you coming to see me?” The voice came from that little side street (it was more a shady lane) that ran along the north boundary of the Izzersted complex. “Just come through this little door in the wall and into my special consulting room and we will have a consultation,” the doctor said.

“I never saw that door in the wall before,” Evangeline told him. “I don't even believe that I can go through a door that little. Well, I came down sort of to see you, but you're so expensive that I just don't know whether I can afford another session.”

“Oh I pay no attention to money,” the little doctor said (Little? No one had ever thought of him as little before), “since money impinges nowhere into the psychology of persons and is of no major interest to them. What have I been charging you?”

“A hundred dollars an hour or part of an hour. It's always at least two hundred dollars a session even if it lasts no more than eight minutes — you know, four minutes in one hour and four minutes in another.”

“Oh that's way too much, Miss Aster,” Dr. Izzersted said. “I couldn't afford to go to myself at that rate. I don't make enough. How about two dollars for as long as the session takes?”

“Are you kidding, doctor?”

“Miss Aster, no! When a psychologist starts kidding, well, that blows him for a psychologist. He might as well break up and be done with it.”

They went through the little door in that wall along the shady lane. The consulting room that they came into was quite small, and Evaneline said that the couch looked like a doll couch.

“It will fit you,” the doctor said. “Lie down.”

Evangeline lay down on the couch and it fit her.

“Your problem, your problem, ah yes,” Dr. Izzersted said. “You have been sleeping in woolies for the past few nights, and you never slept in woolies before in your life. You don’t understand it, and neither do I.”

“How did you know I had been sleeping in woolies?” Evangeline asked.

“Ah yes,” Dr. Izzersted began again. “It is a series of very realistic dreams you have been having, and you are thoroughly ashamed of the role you are playing in them. But you justify yourself by saying that it is not you in the dreams. It is somebody else. You are merely watching while somebody else in your body cavorts through the episodes. And then you have ceased even to watch them. Is that what you are trying to tell me?”

“I haven’t told you anything yet; but yes, that’s the case. Why is this consultation room so little, and why does it seem to be in a different place? Yes, I watch myself, or somebody else who is got up to look like me, doing these things, as I might watch them in a drama. But I watch them from the outside. On the other hand, it is myself who does them, for I am bruised and worn from them every morning. Did you know that -reat affairs of the century are very bruisy? But, on still another hand, there is something secondhand about my bruises, as though they were transferred to my body from another one.”

“Bubbly, mighty bubbly, Miss Aster,” Dr. Izzersted said. “Do you know that some days are very good for blowing soap bubbles (I blow a lot of soap bubbles in my business), and some days are terrible for it? Yes, on a bad day you can add all the clycerin and gloop that you wish to the mixture and you will still not be able to blow decent bubbles. And some fortnights are good for flying eidolons; but most times are very poor for it. This is an excellent fortnight for flying them. I don’t know why this should be.”

“What is an eidolon?” Evangeline asked.

“It was an eidolon of yours, Miss Aser, and not yourself, that carried on one of the great affairs of the century with the eidolon of a prominent man. What we are realiv havinc, this fortnight is an eidoIonic epidemic. But I wasn’t sure that the prirnaries were aware of their own eidolons. You seem to be, to some extent, aware of your own.”

“Then I’m not responsible for what my eidolon does?”

“Of course you’re responsible for it, Miss Aster. Tt,@ere is something

wrong going on in you, and that's the way it comes out."

"But I haven't done anything wrong."

"But you are going to do something wrong, murder or arson or some such. And idolons sometimes blow before the wind and arrive at a crux before their primaries."

"And these idolons have separate bodies?"

"Very infrequently do they have substantial bodies, Miss Aster. Shadow bodies mostly. But this fortnight, as I say, is very bubbly, very good for flying idolons. I believe that there are at least half a dozen solid ones flying in this city of a half million. That is an unusually large component. But it isn't so unusual over a long haul. Every undertaker, after a fortnight such as this, gets bodies that he knows are simply not authentic. Oh they have meat and they have weight, but they are incompletely and sketchily done.

"And there are numerous cases where a body is definitely identified as a person. And then the living person will appear and assert his living identity, and where does that leave the dead and sketchy body? But the first identification will not necessarily have been mistaken. The bodies will (save for the sketchiness of one of them) be bodies of the same person. Even the fingerprints will be identical except that, ah —"

"Except that what?"

"Ah change of subject. The way out of your dilemma, Miss Aster, is to junk your idolon, which is only a splinter of you anyhow. Ah I see a gleam in your eye. Yes, it would be vivid publicity, I suppose. Throw it screaming off a great and prominent, height (and you have always had such a terror of heights!), and then you can reappear —"

"Oh yes! I think I recognize it now. It's been done before. And it works."

"You first came into prominence, Miss Aster, as junior hog-calling champion of Sebastian County, Arkansas, I believe."

"Can we not forget that, doctor?"

"But you are proud of your powerful and blood-curdling scream, with which you won that championship. You believe that, in a more dramatic situation, it might be —"

"Yes, yes, and do I ever have a more dramatic situation in mind for it! It will work, I know that it will."

Evangeline had her genuine sparkle on her now when she saw a

shining opportunity. And Dr. Izzersted, who was smaller today than he usually was, had a queer gleam on him like, well, like glycerin in a soap-bubble solution. Yes, he was just a little bit iridescent. He was incompletely and sketchily done. He was not quite as authentic as he might have been. You couldn't exactly see through him, but he did fracture the light a bit.

"Does the real Dr. Izzersted know about you?" Evangeline asked.

"Yes he does," said Little Sigmund, "though he came to the knowledge of me with extreme difficulty. He uses me a lot in his studies. I become the analogue for the splinters of many people. What the real Dr. Izzersted doesn't know is that I also use him a lot in my studies. And yet I am the real Dr. Izzersted. All the splinters are of the same authentic wood. If I'm not be, then who am I? Will you time your event for the ten-o'clock news?"

"Oh yes, I think so. I believe that it would be the best timing, to do it just a few minutes before the news. Then maybe I will be identified by a bulletin while the program is going on. And then, while they are still staggering from that, I'll appear. I'll electrify everybody, that's what I'll do. Oh thank you, thank you!"

"That will be two dollars, Miss Aster."

"What? You'd actually demand money from a woman on her way to a screaming and plummeting death? Oh you cheese, you cheese!"

Those town-and-cotintry men, Charles Penstock and Ed Rivet, had gone to visit Little Otto Pankration at a loose hour. They knocked at the door of Little Otto's Den, and the door was opened.

They were startled, though, that it was opened by Mr. Pankration himself. But were not Mr. Pankration and Little Otto Pankration the same person? Probably they were. Nevertheless, the two town-addcountry men were startled.

"Oh Mr. Pankration," Ed Rivet said, "we were really looking for Little Otto." And then he felt very foolish.

"Oh go away," Pankration growled. "Vagabonds, out-of-season killers of game, dynamiters of fish, spooks of whatever sort, be gone from here. You are only rags and splinters of men who are dead and gone. In any case, I am locking up the storeroom now."

"Mr. Pankration," Ed asked, "what is that thing that looks like an electric furnace, and isn't?"

“It is an electric furnace,” Mr. Pankration said. He pushed the two town-and-country men out of the doorway, came out the door himself, and closed and locked it behind him. Then he walked around the corner to his main establishment. And Charles Penstock and Ed Rivet stood uncertainly in the road.

Then the door of Little Otto’s Den unlocked and opened again, and Little Otto looked out and hissed for them to come in. Still feeling a little foolish, they entered.

“It should be foggy in the next hours,” Charles Penstock said. “Let’s go to Silly Ghost Cove on Keystone Lake and jug for bullhead catfish.”

“I can’t go, not anymore, not anywhere,” Little Otto said. “He won’t let me out of the complex at all.”

“Who is he?” Ed Rivet asked. “Isn’t he really just yourself? How will he keep you from going out? Will he hide your shoes, like the Ozark farmer did to his wife?”

“Not my shoes, my feet,” Little Otto said. “He hid my feet.”

The other two saw that it was true. Little Otto hadn’t any feet. He wouldn’t be able to go with them.

“He says that you are spooks,” Little Otto said. “He says that your primaries are dead men, and that makes you dirty.”

“That’s true,” Ed Rivet admitted. “You knew that. Ah we’re sorry about your feet.”

Charles Penstock and Ed Rivet went away from there to Silly Ghost Cove on Keystone Lake to jug for bullhead catfish. It was a favorite spot of theirs.

The pundit Barry McNary gave this account the next morning on his program, “The Morning Sun”:

A night of horror rampages on into the glare-eyed dawn. The plummeting, screaming death of the beloved Evangeline Aster was horror enough for any night. But there have been flesh-crawling (yes, and pseudoflesh-crawling) developments since then. And now we are all in stunned and sordid amazement.

Evangeline Aster, that sparkler of the picture tube, that comic with class, had been in unusually high spirits only ten minutes before the tragedy. She had laughed as she told it: “Kids, am I ever going to pull one! I will stand them all on their ears. This stroke is going to put your favorite sparkler into the Big Time. And it will all be good, clean fun. What is

more good, clean fun than an absolute horror stroke?”

Then, at nine forty-seven last night, Evangeline climbed the parapet gingerly (she was afraid of heights) and seemed to be talking to someone there, though she was alone. Then she seemed to stumble (it was almost as if she were pushed by invisible hands), and she fell to her screaming death from the veranda of the forty-ninth-floor Penthouse Club.

She was utterly smashed in the street below. But many observers, including myself, will swear that her scream was repeated in the high air again and again for several minutes after her horrifying death.

Naturally, considering the close friendship of Miss Aster with the people of this station and her frequent appearances here, her violent death of only thirteen minutes before was the main topic on our ten-o'clock news last night. But it was at ten twenty-seven, almost at the end of the news program, that something almost more shocking than Evangeline's death took place.

Evangeline walked into our studio and onto camera, alive and sparkling. Or it seemed as if she did. Something walked into the studio, possibly alive in a gaudy way, and sparkling in a funky manner. And, at first, it looked like Evangeline. I myself had no doubt that it was herself — not for ten seconds or so.

“The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated,” she said. “Oh isn't there any way to update that line? Surely a lot of fuss has been made about an imposter. It is not I who have died, as all of you can see. Here I am, more sparkling and radiant than ever!”

But then something went out of the apparition. It became not Evangeline Aster, but a horrible and revolting caricature of her. What was it? What was it? It was alive. It walked and it talked. And then it staggered and whimpered.

“She tried to push me off,” the apparition whined. “That's what scared me. I didn't think she'd do that to me.”

We closed the station down then and got the horrible situation off of camera.

But the horrible situation has been examined all through the night, from that hour to this, and soon there will be nothing of her left to examine. The horrible situation has been examined by a cosmologist, a meteorologist, a physician, and by a para-psychologist. The walking and talking apparition was, by every basic test, Evangeline Aster. And yet it



wasn't Evangeline as solidly as was the dead body that was in police morgue. But the apparition even had the fingerprints of Evangeline except that, ah — change of subject.

“The weather has been good for eidolons for more than a week now,” the meteorologist said. “Rarely is the weather good for them; most of the time it is no good for them at all. We weathermen believe that they (eidolons, fragments, splinters, ghosts, they are sometimes called) are always present. But most of the time they cannot be seen or heard. And in times of very special weather they can be.”

“No, it isn't alive,” the physician said. “It is apparently an echo or a mirage. It is associated with a certain amount of matter, but it's a loose and perhaps accidental association. No, there's nothing here. It's all illusion.”

“Oh it's plain enough,” the parapsychologist said. “It's a ‘clearly manifest psychic splinter,’ presently impaired by the destruction of its primary. Psychic splinters are so ordinary that they are almost the rule. They're personality fragments, no more than that. They are ‘partially manifest psychic splinters’ when they are poltergeists or other ghosts or presences. But a ‘clearly manifest psychic splinter’ like this one isn't encountered often. I'd like to study her for a long time, but there's only a couple of minutes left for it.”

“There has been something going on around town lately that is almost like a burlesque of my own work, and she's part of it,” added the great parapsychologist Dr. Otto Pankration.

“A lot of me went with her when she went,” the apparition said. “It was like turning out the light in me. She tried to throw me off the parapet. How damned inconsiderate of her anyhow! She told me one thing: ‘Keep screaming, keep screaming.’ Oh I'd forgot that she told me that. I kept it up for a while and then I stopped. I'll start again.”

“It is pseudo-organic,” the cosmologist said. “It is mostly made of glycerin and it is evaporating. Ah glycerin, like we used to put in the soap-bubble mixture. No, there's really nothing to her, gentlemen.”

“She tried to throw me off the parapet, but I threw her off instead,” the apparition said. “I thought that was kind of a joke on her. But she told me to keep screaming on my way down, and I'm on my way down now. I forgot, and I stopped screaming. But I'll start again now.”

The apparition has disappeared. It had become an absolutely

horrifying caricature of Evangeline at the moment of its disappearance.

But the screaming continues, continues, continues

“How long?” we asked.

“No telling,” the parapsychologist said. “It's become immaterial now, and there is no way you can make an immaterial entity shut up, particularly if it is obsessed by a single idea or instruction. The Hollbecker phantom in Germany has been screaming for fifty years now, but nobody pays any attention to it anymore. It is just like any other industrial noise—.”

Oh my God, that scream, that scream, that scream! Will any of us get used to it in even fifty years?

## **LORD TORPEDO, LORD GYROSCOPE**

Karl Riproar was the unusual son of two torpedo-makers, Epstein Riproar and Nastasia Hectic-Smith. Karl was extremely hyperactive in both mind and body. He was a genetic and chromosomic freak, as are all extraordinarily hyperactive persons. And he was descended from a short line of such freaks. By heredity and induced mutation and massive chemical and magnetic intrusion, he became one of the very active and hectic ones.

Epstein Riproar who was Karl's father had been a hyperactive and violent man, an intelligent but erratic doctor and designer who found himself outside the law because of his manufacture of torpedoes. These torpedoes were not the physically explosive directional underwater bombs. They were people who were hyped up to carry out such violent assignments as were given to them. They were powerful and swift, and perhaps they were intelligent. Anyhow, they were of surpassing speed in mind and body, and of relentless strength and power and impetus. There was some argument as to whether the 'torpedoes' were chemically stuffed and stimulated, or whether they were actually mutants. Well, Epstein Riproar made every kind of torpedo that there was any market for, and he sold them to eager buyers for top prices. These torpedoes could be used for hit men or for assassins of every type. They could get in and out of any jam. Because of their speed of attack there was scarce any protection against them. Such mentality as they had was of the high speed variety. They could conceive and carry out a murder or mutilation in a tenth of a second.

Karl's mother was Nastasia Hectic-Smith, a hyperactivist and incendiary and maker of torpedoes herself. She herself had gone through genetic tampering that was deliberately design to double her activity and relentlessness. It also, by one of those slip-ups that some-times happen, doubled her intelligence, which was already high. This was not necessarily a disaster. Torpedoes should have high-speed mentality, but not enduring intelligence. Many of the torpedoes were set to destruct after one hit, so real intelligence would be wasted on them. But it might not be wasted on a manufacturer of torpedoes.

As to where Epstein and Nastasia got their furious energy, well there was a solution to that in their family traditions. It had to come from

somewhere. Yes, it sure did.

Epstein and Nastasia had met as fellow members of that underground and international organization known as “The Restless Lions”. Both of them had been manufacturing torpedoes for various individuals and organizations, and sometimes they had bid against each other and been down-priced. Now they combined their talents and techniques. They became the top manufacturers and purveyors of human torpedoes.

They decided to have a son and turn him into the hottest torpedo of them all, one not intended to self-destruct but to be used again and again with growing expertise. This son was Karl Riproar, one of the most active and turbulent babies ever birthed. The surgical implantations were made in him when he was one day old, to double his inherited activity and restlessness.

~“I hope it doesn’t double his intelligence too,” Nastasia said. “He’ll have enough trouble with it, being so damned smart, without another doubling. It hasn’t been easy for me being always so smart that I’m like to pop. But try to get all that stuff you’ve got in your mind out of your mind, and it isn’t easy.”

“It won’t matter too much, Nastasia,” Epstein said. “The way things are going, it may be an actual advantage for a torpedo is not to carry excess baggage, but super-intelligence may no longer be in excess. I hope that his intelligence does double or even quadruple, so long as it doesn’t put a damper on his energy. And I want to watch it work.”

“Hopping hippos, Epsie, this isn’t ‘Murder-X’ to make him mean that you’ve salted his glands with!” Nastasia howled. “This is ‘Melerex-X’ the nice-guy drug. The chemist made a mistake on our order.”

“He sure did,” Epstein agreed. “Wouldn’t it be funny if our child did turn out to be a nice guy? But the switch may not go too hard. With everything else working in him, and with his inheritance from us, he should be mean enough.”

Actually, the surgical implantation had increased young Karl’s intelligence eight times, but his father didn’t get to watch his development very long. Epstein and Nastasia were killed in a shoot-out a week later. And Karl Riproar, when he was eight days old, was placed in one of those progressive institutions.

“This is the smartest kid ever tested,” said one of the wranglers at the institution to one of the medical monitors. “You could drive a truck down

some of the grooves in his brain. I bet we wouldn't get another kid this smart in a thousand years. Or another kid this active." Actually, they got another one that smart and that active the very next day, but that was an extraordinary happening. And they really weren't likely to get another such for two thousand years.

Karl Riproar grew into a physical and mental wonder, and he was a boy who was always busy. (Maybe you missed the weight of that statement. We was always busy.) He was not just busy twenty-four hours out of the day: it was much more than that. Karl was busy in many depths and directions, and he never let up. He was like a roaring river in his relentless activity and in his constant consuming. He wasn't mean. He was a nice guy. In this, it did matter that the 'Murderex-X' had not been implanted in him. And the 'Melerex-X' had made him person-able and amiable, odd qualities for a natural-born torpedo. But Karl had the relentlessness that is often found in mean people. And he had a spacious glutton that was almost without equal.

He was a glutton for body food and for mental nourishment, and oh for another sort of food also. By the time he was six years old he had things pretty well arranged in his own way at the old progressive institution. A recollection of him when he was about six years old has him sitting at table and shovelling it in at a startling rate, but he was doing many other things at the same time. He had an ear-plug in each ear, and they were receiving two different instructional programs. There were three TV sets before him, two of the programs being educational and the other one being that whanging presentation of violence and adventure and relentless activity 'The Restless Ones'.

Karl had a dictaphone turned onto himself, and he was talking and singing around his food, putting out an amazing spate of entertainment from his 'consciousness three' level. He was also reading one book and one newspaper by eye, and reading another book by braille.

And this was the general format that he would follow for much of his life during the routine of the six forty-five minute periods every day that he was at his meals stuffing in the food and drink. About his only later refinement was his sitting on the john while he did all these other things, for saving time; but this combination was not allowed in that early part of his life that he spent in the progressive institution.

"The attainment levels of the little inmates of this institution aren't as

high as they should be,” a wrangler at the school said to a rhetor (being a progressive institution they had wranglers and rhetors and monitors, but not teachers).

“It’s only in comparison to that Karl Riproar and that Emily Vortex that the attainments of the others seem low,” the rhetor said. “Actually their levels are rising all the time. They are above what we might logically expect them to be.”

“Dammit, this is a progressive institution,” the wrangler said with some wrath. “The attainment levels of the little inmates aren’t as far above what we might logically expect as we might logically expect them to be. Something is hindering them a little, all except Karl and Emily.”

Karl Riproar wasn’t mean. We wasn’t mean at all. Just irresistibly active. The fact was that Karl was an absolutely normal boy through all his boyhood years. He liked everything that all normal and healthy boys like. He just liked those things to be faster and still faster, to be accelerated to their limit; and he liked a lot of them at the same time.

Karl was a physical as well as a mental marvel. He was a superb wrestler and boxer, and he excelled at ever kind of ball, at every event of track and field, at horsemanship and shooting and fishing, at sail-boating and swimming and tight-rope walking, at snake-catching and calf-riding and cartooning, at tumbling and gymnastics and trapeze work, and woodcraft and fieldcraft, at cliff-climbing and building-climbing, at magic tricks and hypnotism, at microscopy and radio-build mg, at taxidermy (well, where did he get that twenty-two foot long alligator skin?), at playing the comet and the harmonica and the musical saw, at ventriloquism and imitations, at building midget cars that would run, at the manufacture of stink-bombs and disappearing ink and itching powder and turnip whisky and dynamite from materials found around the kitchen and store-room of any progressive institution, at sword-swallowing and juggling, at training fleas, at making fire balloons, at duding it up with the girls (it was his outstanding duding it up that won him the companionship of Emily Vortex the fairest and most intelligent and most hyperactive and fastest in the metric mile of all the girls in that particular progressive institution), at making counterfeit money in the printing and engraving section of the ‘useful arts’ department, at making real money in the money market.

“There’s an astonishing amount of angular momentum being

consumed around here,” Wrangler Hoxie remarked one day at the institution. “All that angular momentum that is consumed has to come from some where. Well, where is it coming from? You are a smart boy, Riproar. Why don’t you solve this problem?”

“As to myself, I have kept the problem solved,” Karl Riproar said with that certainty that young boys sometimes have. “That is to say that I have anticipated it and have not let it become a problem.”

“At nine years old you have it solved? Then you’re the boy who’s found the golden fleece, Karl.”

“It wasn’t lost. It was there all the time, Wrangler Hoxie,” Karl said.

“And just when did you begin to solve this problem of energy and angular momentum, Karl?”

“When I had myself sent to this progressive institution. The fleece was here and waiting to be shorn.”

“But Karl, you were only eight days old when —”

“Yes. It doesn’t pay to let a problem get too big a start on you.”

Though Karl excelled at all things and did them with real passion, yet there were many who thought that he did them too rapidly, or that he did too many of them (eight to twelve of them, perhaps more) at the same time.

At field hockey he was the best goal tender in the progressive institution. Nay, he was the best in whole history of that institution. Except when —

— when he was also on call as kicking specialist and punt return man in the football game in the cornering field, or as center fielder in the baseball game in the bordering field (well, deep center field in the one game was very near to the goal in the other, and Karl was very fast and he never missed a fly ball, nor the blocking of a goal-attempt either; but when he was at bat on or base there were complications), or as volleyball player on the adjacent court. (How Karl could jump to spike the ball down over the net! How he had to be on the fantastic rush even to be there to make those wonderful jumps!)

Ah, the memory of him running so swiftly from field to field, catching a fly that looked impossible to catch and pegging it home to nail the runner at the plate, thwarting a hockey goal with an incredible last minute arrival, making a simultaneous save and kill in the coffin corner o~ the volleyball court, swooping under a tumbling punt and returning it

a]] the way back through the whole opposing team to score, all the while holding (and speed-reading) an open book in one hand and having that green (educational) and red (drama) ear plug blaring into his head, and under his chin the microphone into which he was broadcasting continuously to some juvenile radio show! Ah, the memory of that!

And on the fly (always on the fly) making the moves on the scattered boards of the four simultaneous chess games he was playing. Karl Riproar was really something to watch! He was a completely natural and unspoiled boy, but he was so very accelerated about it all.

It was suggested that Karl might have done some of these things better if he did not do so many of them at the same time. This is false. Nobody could have done any of these things better than Karl did them (except, just possibly, running the metric mile). Learning always on the fly, he learned much more than any other inmate in the progressive institution did (except possibly Emily Vortex). There just could not be any better athlete or better student or gamesman or entertainer than Karl

“You are the torpedo, that’s what you are,” one of the other boys at the progressive institution said in admiration.

“We name you Lord Torpedo,” said another of those boys. “You comprehend it all.”

“Why should you call me Lord Torpedo?” Karl Riproar asked. “A torpedo is anything that is torpid, and I am not that. Or is it the torpedo fish which is so torpid that is hardly ever flicks a fin or does anything at all to break its smooth lines. Or it is a destructive weapon in the same smooth lines of that lazy fish, and there is nothing I want less than to be a destructive weapon.”

“We name you Lord Torpedo,” the kid repeated, “because you are so fast and so powerful, and because you never miss. And because you comprehend it all except your new name which is too close to you for that.

Karl could do everything better than any other inmate of the institution, could he? How about the metric mile foot race? There was a little bit of mystery about that. The title-holder in the metric mile was a girl Emily Vortex. Oh, she was fast, she was very fast, but she was also tricky. But Karl Riproar finally challenged her for the title and they staged the gala race.

Emily (they called her Lady Atalanta) broke in front. She was very fast



off the starting blocks. And she maintained a killing pace. But Karl gained on her and came almost up to her. Then she tossed the first of the apples, and how could Karl not swerve aside from anything that looked so good to eat? But Karl had foreseen this. He had made himself an apple-grapple, and he picked it up without breaking speed, and he ate it with a musical munching as he read the book he was carrying in his left hand and changed the station coming in on his left ear-plug.

Emily threw the second apple, and Karl grabbed it neatly with his apple-grapple, and now he was three strides ahead of her. She threw the third apple, and he swooped it in as neatly as he had the others, and now he was six strides ahead of her and going away. But as he bit into that third apple he came onto something more than juicy fruit. The thing exploded in his mouth, and it threw out a homing directional device. This was a holo, leaded balls on the ends of raw-hide ropes, and the holo wrapped around Karl's ankles and threw him. And Emily went on to win the race and retain her title.

The holo, in its second stage, hog-tied Karl with his hands behind him and his hands and feet together and him writhing helpless. Then Emily came back with a fourth apple and jammed it in Karl's mouth. Yeah, he was the trussed pig with the apple in his mouth, and Emily's triumph was complete.

But this did not put Karl's spirits down at all. Rather it elevated them, and now he acquired a special affection for this Emily Vortex.

Karl made fortunes in the stock market and on the various money exchanges.

"There are a lot of empty places in the money shuffle and they're just crying out to be filled up," Karl said. Then he explained how he did it all:

"Inerrant prediction is the key," he said. "But faulty prediction is worse than none at all. You must know where you are, have a stable axis, for accurate prediction. The gyroscope is the best of all prediction

himself a gyroscope, then he has all the predictions by their gyrating instruments since it is the only one with a stable axis. But if a person is tails."

This is the explanation of how he made fortunes in the money markets? Well, Karl did have what can only be called a high rate of rotation in all his activities, and in that sense he was a gyroscope. He was even called Lord Gyroscope by some of his fellow inmates in the

progressive institution. This was from a take-off done on him in one of the gridiron entertainments at the institution.

“Are we going to have a crisis in energy sources around here?” Emily Vortex asked Karl Riproar one day. “I come from an older family than you do in this hyperactivity business and I know where to draw energy from. But is there enough for both of us? Are you hogging it? If there will only be enough for one of us, then I know which one it will be. Myself.”

“I hog it a little bit, Emily,” Karl said, “but there will be enough for us both until it is time for us to leave here. And for the time after than, I have plans. See my plans.” And he showed her his prospectus of things to come in this area.

“Not bad for starters,” Emily Vortex said. “Give them to me. I’ll work theii~ over and see if something really good can’t be made out of them.”

2.

When he came to his fifteenth birthday and was officially of age, Karl Riproar did a number of quick things.

He funded and founded the “Karl Riproar and Emily Vortex Simultaneous Arts Institution and Perpetual Memorial”. He ordered construction to begin on it that very day.

He declared himself to be “Ultra-Departmental Director” of the city, using a little-known emergency provision by which he put the previous ultra-departmental director under citizen’s arrest and replaced him.

He founded the “Karl Riproar and Emily Vortex Sky’s the Limit Speculation and Enjoyrntment Enterprises” which survives even to this day.

He married Emily Vortex.

Let us not have an inaccuracy creep into this account. He didn’t marry her that day. It was the following day that they got married. Emily was one day younger than Karl and did not come of age till the following day. But their marrying was part of the number of quick things that they effected as soon as they could.

Karl legally changed his name to ‘Lord Torpedo Lord Gyroscope’. But on a practical basis he would still go by the name of Karl Riproar.

He founded the “Imperial Compressed Music Company”.

He bought the land for the “Pleasant Meadows Home Development Project”. He had construction on the homes begin at once, and also on his own manor house and gardens which would occupy the central portion of that area.

He gathered in funds from a number of annuities that he had set up to mature when he was fifteen years old. He shuffled those funds. He increased them amazingly. The money for their increase had to come from somewhere. Really it was a toll levied on all the money markets of the country. But it was one of those tricks that are done only once.

Anything else?

No, those were the main projects of Karl Riproar and Emily Vortex. They were set up then, and all working pieces were working. They could play endless and trick variations with these projects, but the basics were there from this first establishment.

So Karl Riproar waxed in years and size and strength and mentality and activity and angular velocity and momentum.

To describe the simultaneous developments and achievements and pleasures of Karl Riproar and Emily Vortex would require a talent for simultaneity equal to their own. So we will describe the course of Karl mostly. Their courses ran roughly parallel, but we understand Karl's better. Besides, we're scared of Emily. She's weird.

Karl Riproar, the boy and man who was so much in a hurry that he had to do as many as a dozen things at once, he now entered a timeless realm and regime in which there was no pressure at all but in which more things happened in more momentous and more massive fashion than ever before.

"This is like Heaven," Karl said one day.

"Not quite," said the usually more accurate Emily. "I calculate that the number of contacts in Heaven is two and a half times what we're experiencing, that the angular-momentum there is almost three times what we've achieved, and that the quantity of life there is nearly four times what we've reached here. But we're closing the gap, Kar11 we're closing it."

The quantity of life, that was it. If you hear people talk too much about the "quality of life" do not pay attention to them. The quality is always predicated on the quantity. The more life there is the better it is. The abundance of it is the whole thing. It cannot be rich and detailed if it isn't abundant.

Rich and detailed and abundant, that was a good description of their "Imperial Compressed Music Company." Music solidifies at very high speed. You didn't know that? Three-hour-long works of limpid melody

can be turned to ultra high speed and then compressed and solidified into mere micro-seconds, into depth-moments of total enjoyment and no duration at all. These compressions can be enjoyed, one or ten or ten thousand of them, exquisite morsels for the sensually-educated elite.

This was strictly high fidelity stuff as Karl and Emily processed it. The morsels were complete and unabridged, every note and shading of the originals there, all of it for instantaneous enjoyment. Karl and Emily enjoyed such music, more than one could hear in a hundred lifetimes ordinarily, and they also marketed it at a high profit to the very wealthy.

And the “Pleasant Meadows Home Development Project” was an abundant success. This project provided three thousand homes on beautiful rolling foot-hills, for persons of the intellectual and aesthetic elites. This became a super-intellectual community such as has not been seen since Florence, since Tara, since Athens. There was cross-fertilizing vigor and power there; there was the high stimulus of art and drama and literature and all the winged sciences. And the financial arrangements were so favorable to the people that those selected simply could not afford to pass the project up. “To those who have much, much will be given” was the slogan of the project, and it worked.

Most of the three thousand homes were filled with the very young and the very promising elements of the cream of the cream. Many of them moved on after a year or two or three, and their places were always taken by others even more promising and more select. Some of the people sickened and died, but the genius people have always have a proclivity towards early deaths. No matter, there were always fresh faces and fresh minds and really sparkling people arriving every day. And Karl and Emily lived in the middle of them, in the manor house on the top of Torpedo Mountain to which all the surrounding country was foothills.

Karl and Emily had a good thing going in the “Pleasant Meadows Home Development Project”. If you areas canny as they were, and you develop and sell three thousand homes, then you make fortunes out of them, even if you give not-to-be-refused deals. And if, for some reason, there is a high turnover in home ownership there, and you keep surety strings on the properties, then you can make those fortunes over and over again every two or three or four year.

And all the while there is the pleasure of the stimulating company of that large and talented neighboring group. And that brilliant

neighborhood group had the pleasure of the acquaintance of what was, perhaps, the most gyroscopic couple in the world.

As to themselves, Karl and Emily were so well attuned that the disagreements between them were few and small. One of those disagreements (a disagreement over no more than ten seconds time) had to do with their own intimate congresses. Karl thought that twenty seconds each time was long enough for such event. “That is, after all, one hundred and thirty billion times as long as it took for the ‘big bang’ that produced the universe,” Karl said reasonably, “and we do it eight times a night, and twelve times on Wednesdays and Saturdays. And we do only a very few other things while we are doing it. Really, can we reasonably give more than twenty seconds to it each time?”

Emily thought that they should take at least thirty seconds to it, but she had to admit that there was almost total pleasure and realization in those twenty-second encounters of theirs. They would wake or half-wake from the multi-level, rich, and detailed dreams that such gyroscopic people have (each of them could dream from eight to twelve dreams at the same time); they would hold their magic congress (doing only a very few other things while they were enjoying the twenty seconds of it); and then they would plunge back into their high-frequency and variegated sleep again.

Their usual night congresses followed (according the Karl’s dream regime; we don’t know Emily’s) these dream cycles which would take their names from the dominant dream motif of each group:

1. The Alpha-Orlando Dream sequence.
2. The nightly episode of the Green Ocean Dream Serial.
3. The First Genovese Dream Experience.
4. The “Aemilia of the Ten Thousand Eyes” dream encounter.
5. The apprehensive “Don’t Push That Button, Dammit, That Button Blows Up the World” nightmare.
6. The Second Genovese Dream Experience.
7. Karl’s Signature Dream, the “Falling Through Rotting Space” nightmare.
8. The “Hofstadter Passion” dream sequence.

So you can see that their happy carnal encounters, following this evenly spaced schedule of dream, would be pretty well strewn out through the night.

“I wonder if poor people ever dream?” Emily speculated once.

But, for them, every night and day, every hour and every minute (by quintessential third-powering they could have as many as 216,000 minutes in every hour) was crammed and overflowing with pleasure and fulfillment.

And it went on that way for many happy years.

“Wrangler Hoxie back at the progressive institution, used to wonder about the astonishing consumption of angular momentum in our vicinity,” Karl Riproar the Lord Torpedo and Lord Gyroscope said one day. “He said that all that angular momentum had to come from somewhere.”

“Whatever made you think of that?” Emily asked with her smiles (she could smile as many as twelve different smiles at one time). “It wasn’t the Chairman of the Environmental Quality Board who is puffing up the incline to our front door?”

“Yes” Lord Karl said. “He is wondering about the same old questions. Have we been shearing our sheep too closely, do you suppose?”

“Oh yes, we have. There should have been enough of them to keep both of us. But, Karl, we have increased our consumption of everything so very much as the years go by.”

The Chairman of the Environmental Quality Board came in and talked to them for ten minutes. For ten minutes! Why that was almost the equivalent of ten days’ experience the way they usually compressed it. And they had to slow down to voice speed to carry on the talk with him.

“The attainment levels of the three thousand genius families in the ‘Pleasant Meadows Home Development Project’ aren’t as high as they should be,” the Chairman of the Environmental Board said in a guarded voice.

“They are higher than for any other group of equal numbers in the world,” Emily told him. “Best in the world isn’t bad.” Emily was luxuriating her bare feet on the floor before her. She was receiving through the soles of her feet. There were elite soles-of-the-feet broadcast and reception programs for persons of extraordinarily fine sensibilities. There were two such programs, and Emily was enjoying one with each foot.

“Yes, the attainment levels of the people in the Pleasant Meadows Project are higher than any group anywhere else,” the board chairman

agreed. “And yes, it is higher than we could logically expect it to be. But —”

“But is it as high above what you might logically expect as you might logically expect it to be?” Emily asked. “Is that your question?”

“Yes. Considering your own unique elevating influence, that is my question,” the board chairman said challengingly. “A thing that big is hard to hide forever,” said Karl Riproar the Lord of Torpedo and Gyroscope.

Then the three of them looked at each other for a while.

“Where does all that personal and psychic energy, all that angular momentum come from?” the board chairman asked. “You consume colossal amounts of it.”

“Oh, it comes from the sheep,” Karl said, “from the pleasant genius sheep of Pleasant Meadows. We shear them but we do not butcher them. Why were you not afraid to come here alone?”

“I’m not alone. I have back-up,” the board chairman said. “But I’m not afraid because when you do kill (and I suppose that it is accidental when you do it) you kill very slowly. It takes about three years for it to happen. But I intend to settle you two in about three minutes. I have only to blow this whistle that I wear around my neck. There is no way you can prevent me blowing it. And it is tuned —”

“I know what it is tuned to,” Karl Riproar said, “and I know that we can’t prevent it blowing, since it will blow of itself.” Then the whistle did begin to blow, apparently by itself. It did not blow an alarm though. It blew a pleasant little tune that went out over the aether. Why should the pleasant little tune, or the whistle blowing by itself, have frightened the board chairman? Oh, because he didn’t expect anything like that, and he didn’t know what was going on.

The board chairman held the whistle in his hands now, and still it blew by itself. The board chairman turned white, and he pulled the whistle from around his neck and flung it across the room.

“My you are nervous!” Emily smiled to the board chairman. The whistle still blew of itself on the floor across the room. And the burden of its message was “All clear. No difficulty. You can go now.” That was the message that the whistle sent out over the aether. And back-up vehicles fifty meters away were seen and heard to leave.

“How?” the board chairman croaked.

“Simple ventriloquism,” Karl said. “Were you never young and tricky? A childhood hobby of mine. I could make pianos and violins seem to play by themselves, seem to play quite well too. And, as ‘Ultra-Departmental Director’ of the region for life, I am the one who has set up all codes and signals.”

“You are vampires,” the board chairman said. “The energy consumed by your dazzling simultaneities comes from the blood of others.”

“Not from blood, from ichor,” Karl Riproar said.

“And ‘vampire’ is a crass word used only by crass people,” Emily smiled. And they both were doing many other things at the same time and not paying very much attention to that board chairman or his investigation of them.

“You suck blood, or you suck ichor-energy,” the board chairman said bitterly. “You are judged and condemned.”

“You cannot judge us. We are special cases,” Emily said, and she took a dozen compressed music morsels and went dreamy-eyed on them.

“So all the vampires have always said, that they were special cases,” the chairman remarked. “And are you both of old vampire families?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think there’s any such thing,” Karl said. “Both my parents were torpedo-manufacturers.” And Karl was doing a piece of hot-stone sculpture, holding the anode in his left hand, and speed-reading a mathematics text that he held in his right hand.

“How do you think a creature feels to have the juice and the very life of him sucked out?” the board chairman asked belligerently.

“Like you feel,” Karl said.

“As you feel now,” Emily smiled. “As you begin to feel now.”

“I begin to feel giddy,” the board chairman said. “But it won’t be — all at one time?”

“There are some that we can’t draw just a little bit of juice from and leave,” Emily said, “because a little bit is all that they have in them. Oh yes, I code-dial a doctor for you, but he will be too late. A strange case, so we will have to report it; that you were irrational when you came here, and that you just weakened and died.”

Karl and Emily did a number of pleasant things (ten or twelve of them at the same time) as they waited for the doctor’s lorry to pick up the Chairman of the Environmental Quality Board. Lord Karl put a plug in his left nostril and tuned its direction and amplification to pick up the



wonderful aroma a Sweet clover in Pleasant Meadows. He inhaled and enjoyed, and by doing so he consumed all the energy and pleasure potential that was in the board chairman, who thereupon expired.

**THE ONLY TUNE THAT HE COULD PLAY  
OR  
WELL, WHAT WAS THE MISSING ELEMENT?**

Tom Halfshell was taking his major in Trumpet-playing, his minor in Nostalgic Folklore, and his outreaching corollary in Monster-Morph.

“That isn’t a perfect balance, Tom my son,” his father had said. “The selection is too soft. It’s a soft art, a soft science, and a soft speculative synthesis. My son, you had better introduce a harder and more manly element into your studies. “

So Tom took up Hard Geography for his sustaining corollary. This gave him four fields of study beyond the basics, a heavy schedule for even an intelligent young man. And this got Tom where it hurt, because he was not very intelligent. He was intuitive, he was rhythmic, he was effervescent, he was enthusiastic; and he was a young man of tone and taste. But he just wasn’t very intelligent.

Still, he got good acceptance by both his elders and his contemporaries. And the hard hand of friendship will help one through almost any course.

Tom and three of his friends, Cob Coliath, Duke Charles, Lion Brightfoot, manly boys all, talked about his deficiencies and advantages, and the varying joys of the world, as they hunted fierce hogs with spears from muleback one spring morning.

“You are an unmatched half, Tom,” Cob Coliath shouted as he doubled back on his coursing mule after a very tricky and tangle-footed hog, “and ours is a world full of unmatched wholes. Complete yourself, Tom, complete yourself! “

Anything to do with man’s best friend the swine is a worthy occupation, and lance-killing is a particular joy. The swine is meat and leather. He is also ferocity and fun and friendship. Spilling hogs’ blood is almost as tall a thing as spilling one’s own.

“Complete myself, that’s what I’m trying to do!” Tom howled as he killed the boar with an absolutely perfect lance-thrust, from a bad angle, and already past the beast. And the other young men gasped in admiration.

Tom Halfshell wasn’t as big or as strong as these other young men. He

hadn't their tough intelligence, or their dedicated hardness, or their steadiness of hand. And yet he had more spectacular kills than any of them, with a real virtuosity of lance and mule-handling and boar-butchering. He was the least of the four in every element that should count high in boar-spearing, but he made the most kills, and he made them more dazzlingly than the others.

One of the things he had was trickiness, a quality not much understood.

"Unmatched Halfshell Tom," Duke Charles sang as he led the charge after more of the fierce and bristling porkers. The four young men had killed nine hogs, and they had three more to go this morning. "Halfshell Tom, it always seems that there should be another half to you somewhere. When they spun the naming wheel, it stopped just right for your name. You do so many things well, and still you are not complete. Why not? There's an OTHAFA element in incomplete things. The rest of us are complete. Watch that porker!"

The porker, a solid, tusked boar, cut back into the feet of Tom's mule and knocked the beast down. It cut back a second time on a shorter radius and charged Tom who had barely found his feet after being thrown. It was in too close for Tom to use the lance blade, and he used the lance butt and spun the charge of the boar twice. And then the boar had him —

— but Lion Nrightfoot had the boar then, with a slicing, almost backhand thrust of his blade, as Lion's mule, a clattering hack who enjoyed his work, brought him in exactly to 'top kill' position on a long sweep.

Ten porkers killed. Two to go. And the shaken but talented Tom Halfshell was on muleback again and leading a new charge.

There was great friendship among these four boys, and they risked their lives and limbs for each other again and again. Their coursing area was only the hog-run behind a small slaughterhouse, and there were surely easier and safer ways to slaughter the exciting and embattled hogs. But hogs should be slaughtered splendidly. All things concerning hogs, those totem animals, should be done as splendidly as possible.

Now there was a furious and fleet-footed sow among the porkers left, and she was super-dangerous. There were elements of hate and intuition among sows. Swine were man's best friend, but that didn't apply to the

disappearing sows of the species. The sows felt somehow (for they could not really know, since the thing was never mentioned in their presence) that even the remnant of them would soon be replaced by clone-boars.

This fist sow was all the more deadly for being short-tusked and close-coupled. She was murder, challenging and charging murder.

“Thank all things that there is no analogy to men to these fierce, carry-over animals,” Coliath called. “We’d all be better dead than have such savage things within our own species. Watch it, Lion! Watch it, Tom!” The boys would rather find their eleventh and twelfth kills among the uncomplicated porkers, but this shrilling and squealing sow forced the kill upon them. She threw the mules of Cob Coliath and Duke Charles with charges so swift that those canny-footed animals could not cope with them at all.

But then it was the bloodied Tom on his own lamed mule who killed her with such trickery and curious desire. The other three of them did not like to be involved with the remnant sows at all: but Tom Halfshell liked it particularly. He had her in all exciting and bristly kill. His lance had a large gout of flesh on it when he was finished, and Tom for a moment had the notion of having a pet pig from it.

And then the ridiculousness of that idea struck him. It was only from bits of boars’ flesh that pigs were ever cloned. Besides, Tom already had one little pet pig. He would wait till it was too big to be a pet before he requisitioned another one.

Then Tom Brightfoot killed the anticlimactic twelfth porker.

Oh, it was all simply hard and hot and bloody work that the boys had to do: but they would not have been boys of the species if they hadn’t been able to infuse it with glory. They dragged the dead porkers to the tripods at mule-tail, and they had the first of them hoisted up quickly. They began to skin them to the time of their own hog-skinning songs. Youth, youth, and the danger and death that it loves to bring even the easiest task! This was fullness. This was completeness!

Except for Tom Halfshell. And they always joked that he was in some way incomplete. But there was something unusually important coming up this day.

“We are lucky that we will all take part in the ‘Last Man Festival’ tonight,” Lion Brightfoot shouted as he worked the skinning knives and tongs with strong hands. “There have been ‘Last Man Festivals’ before,

but this is the last of them all. This 'Last Man Who Remembers' is a hundred and forty years old, and that doesn't even count the twelve 'given' years. My father says that we will invent other festivals, that we will never run out of festivals; but nothing like this one can ever be held again. It's the end of an era, he says. We will all play tonight in the bands, but only Tom will be with the twelve trumpeters. Will you play the brass trumpet, Tom?"

"No, I think I'll play the conch-shell trumpet," Tom said. "Anyone can play the brass trumpet. "

"And no one can play the conch-shell like you", Duke Charles cut in. "You'll drive us clear over the hills with that conch-shell tune of yours, Tom. The way you play the conch-shell, it's demanding an answer."

"It is, yes," Tom said, "and sometimes I think that I can hear that answer from over the hills. Mine is one tune that's supposed to have an answer. I had a Butterfly Moon Shell once and tried to play it, but I could get no real music out of it at all. And the Butterfly Moon Shell is listed by the musicology museum as 'deceptive and non-musical'. But I bet someone could play it. I bet someone could play the answer to my time on it. Maybe, to some people somewhere, the conch-shell trumpet is 'deceptive and nonmusical.' No, I can't tell you in words what I mean. But I could tell you on the conch-shell what I mean, if you would only listen and understand it. I bet the 'Last Man Who Remembers' understands it. I saw him yesterday, and he had a mighty deep look to him.\*

"The Last Man won't understand anything after tonight," Cob Coliath said, as he did fine and strong work with a butcher's saw. "He will die tonight, and he says that he's ready for it. His official title is 'The Last Man Who Remembers,' you know."

"Who remembers what?" asked Tom who was not quite as intelligent as the others.

"Oh, if anyone else remembered what it was, then he wouldn't be the last man to remember it," Lion Brightfoot said reasonably. "And when he is finally dead, then no one at all will know what the old secret was. It was a crumby thing anyhow, they say. And my father maintains that nobody now left would understand it even if it were explained to him."

These four boys had arrived on simultaneous requisitions just about two years before this. They were boys as good as any you will ever find. And the fact was that men and boys, like everything else, were getting

better all the time. Men now had a thorough understanding of what they were doing when they put in their requisitions for sons. They were more scientific about it than ever before, They understood the goal, and they got the results.

“The reason for the world is the enjoyment of the world,” was a sound current ethical-scientific statement, “and the reason for men and boys is the fulfillment and pleasure of those same men and boys.”

The men and boys did fulfill, and they did please themselves. They lorded it over the universe and they brought it into accord and resonance with themselves.

2

These four boys who had come from the potting sheds at the same time were doing quick and hard pork work (the most meaningful and totemistic of all work). And after they had worked, they must go to their instructions. It would be that way all their lives: in the mornings, work; all the afternoons, instructions; in the evenings, enjoyments. Intellectuality and friendship and art and pleasure were the things that life was built upon, and not one of them must be slighted.

These boys usually took their basic courses together; and then they took their majors and minors and corollaries with others who followed the same specialties. But even in the specialty subjects, there were ‘cross-currents,’ meetings between the basic friends. And the instructions must be carried out as splendidly as the pig-killings and other things.

Boys came to their instruction years with explosive momentum: and the acquisition of knowledge and skill and understanding was supposed to continue at an explosive pace all their lives., The perfect balance, the passion, and the (yes) the serenity, can only come at high speed, as a rapidly spinning top will have balance and surety and serenity. But when it slows down, then it wobbles, and sometimes it falls.

When the boys had been in the potting sheds (the fleshpots and the mindpots) they had developed great bodily and psychic mental intensity, but they had not been conscious in any of those areas. They had been in the large, unconscious, amitotic environment of intense activity kept well below the surface. It was there that the requisitions for sons were fulfilled; it was there that the selections were made as to what things should rise above the surface, what things might be kept in harmless somnolence below the surface forever, and what things must be destroyed

while they were still below the surface to prevent them from making trouble later.

So it was that the boys broke up through the surface of that environment with bright memories in some areas, and with gappy holes in their memories on other sections. Into the holes in their memories, other sorts of things might be flowed during the instructions, things of unrelated substance. But all the boys broke through that old surface with great power, like porpoises leaping, like rockets riding on controlled explosions, like shouting stones hurled by spring-released catapults. And when the boys surfaced they became conscious, and they were all registered as having the 'given' age of twelve years. (They might have been in the amitotic environment anywhere from six weeks to six months: but not twelve years.)

Tom Halfshell went at noon to his instructions in his major of Trumpet Playing and related subjects. Horns were paramount in the musical part of the instructions. All boys arrived with the memory of blowing a sort of Triton's horn in the depths of a sea. Drums and gongs and bells and clanging iron were important in their music also, and the rattling and singing woods, and even strings and keyboards. But it was the horns, and their cousins the pipes, that were the royal instruments.

Tom Halfshell played the brass trumpet as formal instrument, and the conch-shell trumpet as informal instrument. And he was good, much better than any of his fellows, on brass or wood or shell or bone horns, or pig-tooth whistles or penny whistles, or even on that most royal of all instruments, the squealing, pig-stomach, Bag-Pipe. And yet he was not at ease with the pig-pipe, nor it with him.

"You are much better than the other boys, Tom," the instructor told him, "but they are complete, and you are not. There is something amiss with your blowing. There may even be outlawed OTHAFA elements in your tune. Your tune keeps looking for a missing piece and calling out for it. But, by the character of the world that we live in, there is no such missing piece. Do you understand that?"

"I understand it as a statement, but sometimes I feel otherwise as a feeling," Tom Halfshell said.

"You are not allowed to feel too otherwise," the instructor told him. "I am recommending that you change your major from the trumpet to the pig-stomach bag-pipes. Your father is a piper and not a trumpeter, and

his requisition for you was for a piper.”

“No, I must stay with the trumpet and the conch-shell trumpet,” Tom said. “My tunes will not talk right on anything else.”

“You seem to have an endless repertoire of tunes,” the instructor said. “You seem to have them, but you haven’t. All the th’igs that you play are variations of the same time. Leave that time, Tom. You play it well, but incompletely. Play other tunes, even if you play them badly for a while.”

“No, I can’t,” Tom said, “It’s the only tune that I can play.”

“But it has OTHAFA elements in it.”

“I don’t know what those elements are, and you can’t or won’t tell me.\*

“Ah, I always hate to see a boy chopped down before he ever becomes a man,” the instructor said sadly. “Your blood be upon yourself!\*

3

In his minor, Nostalgic Folklore, Tom Halfshell also had his difficulties, to go along with his splendid experiences. Nostalgic Folklore was full of holes:

That’s the best that call be said about it. There had been changes made. Once it had not been all Swine-Myth and Solar-Myth. Once, perhaps, there had been Moon-Myth in it, and other things. But you could sure get yourself demerited if you asked why there were no moon-myths now. There were quite a few areas that you had to avoid.

And the name of the course was the trickiest thing about it. Yes, it was very evocative of nostalgia: but there were so many sections of forbidden nostalgia. There were blood memories whose expression had been erased. And there was foolish stuff of poor quality that had been put in to fill the holes where something had been torn out by the roots. In particular was the land or plateau of OTHAFA blocked out, and yet there was evidence that any tricky boy could see that the land had once been central to folklore.

Monster-Morph was a powerful course. It converged on man as its center. Man himself was the golden monster to whom all the roads and designs ran. And the primordial morphs of men were all interesting, trolls and boogermen, bears and apes and swine, lions — aye — and eagles, giants and ogres, cyclops, and one-eyed pirates. The last was quite revealing, for men seemed to be returning to the powerful single-eyed vision that had once been his. Modern man was particularly accident



prone to the blinding of one (but not both) eyes. One man in three now wore a black patch over the blinded left (or sinister) eye, and it was a patch of honor. And Tom had learned that, as a thing quite recent, men were requisitioning cyclopean or one-eyed sons. And they were getting them too, now, for the first time, in this very season. There is much to be said for the power of the single vision.

The power of monsters was assumed into man, and what man or boy would not glory in such an accretion? But Tom Halfshell was bothered by a devious monstrosity omitted. There had to be complementary shapes to the power-monsters, and there weren't. There had to be complementary colors and after-images to the golden Solar-Swine who was man. But something had happened to the ability to see after-images.

Over the hills was a land named OTHAFA, but it wasn't on the maps of Musicology, Nostalgic Folklore, or Monster-Morph. That is why Tom had selected Hard Geography as his sustaining corollary when his father had advised him to take an additional instruction. Tom wanted to learn some Hard Geography about one particular place.

And there was some semi-hard geography about the particular place, but not really hard. There was even the statement that OTHAFA was a generic term and that there might be a dozen or so of such regions (one of them very big) in the world. There was also the statement that OTHAFA might be regarded as the archipelago of many hard-surmounted islands, showing the same (non-geographic) characteristics in every instance.

"There is something in the OTHAFA Archipelago that has cut us off as sheerly as we have cut it off," was one statement. But was it a statement of Hard Geography? As geographical information, it was very frustrating.

There was only shadow information about the place in Musicology and Nostalgic Folklore and Monster-Morph and Hard Geography. There were only fossil memories. And Tom found that he would not be able to go to the place himself.

"You have already broken it by asking," the instructor of Hard Geography said. "A well-raised boy would not have the trickery to ask. No, permits to go there are not given to anyone now, nor have they been for many years. It is a sign of criminality even to ask.

"Ah, Tom, I always liate to see a boy chopped down before he ever becomes a man. Your blood be upon yourself!"

And yet there was a coherent fantasy about the OTHAFA Archipelago.

Part of it was Tom's private fantasy. Part of it was the private fantasies of several other boys. These fantasies had elements in common, and those elements were handed down from somewhere. Besides, remnants of kite-nets were found (they might float on the air for long distances). And animals were sometimes taken that had that old three-point wound marks as though somebody had botched killing them with a trident.

There was an almost documented fantasy if the things were put together.

The folks of the Archipelago were creatures of the moon-snail totem. From a distance, they looked a little bit like men. But on closer view — well, they weren't men. They sure weren't men.

They were night hunters. They were net people. They used fowling nets (the kite-nets of which pieces were sometimes found), hunting nets, and fishing nets to capture their winged, legged, or finned prey. And they used tridents or daggers to kill their netted game.

They also used a light and swift net in style between the hunting and fishing net that swept their totem moon-snails up from the wet grass. And they used another light and swift net in a style between the fowling and hunting net that could take a bemused doe-deer where it stood with raised head, and extinguish its breath with its strangling, running draw-loop before the ritual trident was even brought into play.

The folk of the Archipelago were moonlight hunters, and they signalled with Moon-Snail trumpets.

Sometimes Tom Halfshell, thinking of these things, rose late at night and went to the high Festival Meadow to blow powerfully on his conch-shell trumpet. He would blow, and then he would listen for an answer. He would blow, and then listen again. But the answering music-call (Tom had a fantasy that it would come from an unplayable shell-trumpet of the Butterfly Moon Snail) never came from the inland islands beyond the hills.

Then, on the last night of them all for him, the answer did come briefly, in a briefness of only seven notes. But it came just a little bit too late for Tom to hear it.

4

That was on the night of the 'Last Man Who Remembers' Festival. Tom Halfshell had been selected as one of the twelve high Horn-Boys for that festival. Really, he wasn't that good. He was better than any of his

fellows in the immediate instruction classes, but the dozen high Horn-Boys for this festival were selected out of hundreds of instruction classes. There may have been a hidden reason for Tom being selected to so high an honor. There were a lot of cryptic remarks bouncing off of him that final evening.

Even Tom's father, as several of the instructors had said in the same stilted words, "Your blood be upon yourself!"

"Let it be in myself and on myself then," Tom said cheerfully. "My blood sings in me tonight."

"The Only Song That Yen Can Play, is that what it sings to you?" the father asked.

"Yes, it does sing that, and maybe some additional trumpetings also. Father, that is a requisition for a son that you are filling out there. And that is a cloning vial of your flesh and blood that you are packaging with it. That is not a legal thing for you to do. You already have a son, myself."

"It will be legal," Tom's fither told him. "I am dating it tomorrow, and I won't mail it util after midnight."

The 'Last Man Who Remembered' was a crowing, cackling little monster of a fellow. He was a hundred and forty years old, and that didn't even count the twelve 'given' years.

"Heh, heh, they weren't 'given' to me," he cackled to an audience of a million men and boys. "I came before that. I'm the only one left who came before. "

There were about a million men and boys there. The people liked to invent festivals every week or so and flock to them. There was an eighty acre festival ground between the city below and the hills beyond. The people watched one half of a football game. Then they had band music and speaking and short snatches from the Last Man Who Remembered.

"Heh, heh," the Last Man Who Remembered crowed to the people. "They ragged and they nagged. And what can you do with nagers and ragers? Get rid of them, that's all."

And an officer of some high station addressed the crowd briefly: "Ours is a world to be lived in. It is a complete world. It is the way we like it."

They had the semifinals of the regional pig-sticking tournament then, and some of the best riders and lancers in the nation took part. They had three hundred marching hands, but they often had more than that at their weekly -- festivals. They had thirty speakers, loaded with wit and

program, and limited to thirty seconds each. They had the second half of the football game then.

All of these things were carefully balanced and interspersed. And again and again they cut back to the 'Last Man' for his remarks:

"Heh, heh," the Last Man Who Remembered cackled. "They thought that we couldn't get along with them. We showed them. There used to be the saying 'You can't live with them and you can't live without them.' And then there came along a taller saying 'The hell we can't live without them!'"

"This 'Last Man Who Remembers' will soon be on his way out of the world," an official announced. "He will be accompanied by a boy, and by the pet pig of the boy."

The select dozen Horn-Boys blew with such trumpeting power that there were, here and there in the assembly, burst ears and blood running down jowls. The boys blew superbly: but one of them, so it was bruited about by those who understand high trumpeting, blew incompletely. This incomplete trumpeter would have to be killed, the rumor said. But one always hates to see a boy chopped even before he even becomes a man.

There was a heavyweight prize fight, very good, and it ended in a knockout in four rounds.

"Heh, heh, they were always more trouble than they were worth," the Last Man Who Remembered was cackling to the assembly. "Well, we did give up something when we gave them up, heh, heh, but I'm the only one who remembers what it was, so it won't matter to the rest of you. "

"There are still some few persons who are incomplete and unsatisfied," another high official announced. "There's about one of them in a million. They believe that they're missing something. Some of them even believe that the missing element lingers on the other side of the hills. But all of us who have our sanity and balance know that there is nothing worthwhile over the hills, that we're not missing anything. What could there possibly be that we don't already have?"

The twelve loud trumpets spoke again, and then one of them predominated. It didn't win place for loudness or for excellence either. It won a temporary first place by the trickiness of its time. There was shocking joy in that tune, but there was more joy in the knowledge that there would be extra bonus blood spilled that night.

"Hey, hey, 'tis said that some of them are still left in the OTHAFA

valleys,” the Last Man Who Remembered crowed. “I never believed it.”

And now the action picked up pace and moved to the climax. Twelve trumpets shouted together. And then eleven of them fell silent, and a single one kept on with its strange time that seemed to be requiring an answer or at least a counterpoint. “It’s the only tune that he can play,” people with special trumpet knowledge told their neighbors. Then the lone trumpeter with his conch-shell trumpet still roaring and soaring came to the very center of the arena. His pet pig was at his heels; and the finest riders and lancers came to that same center which was really the coursing area.

The Last Man Who Remembered, wired for sound so that none of his observations might be lost, was brought to that same central area.

“Heh, heh, we got rid of them,” he cackled. “Good riddance. They kept the whole world in a turmoil. How is it that the trumpet-boy knows about them though? Well, no matter. He’ll be going with me.”

Tom Halfshell, the trumpet-boy, still played. The expert pig-lancers were in the mule-saddles to make their kills and send the three creatures on their ways.

“Heh, heh, they’re well forgotten,” the Last Man crowed. “They were one kind of fun, but there were so many other kinds of fun that you couldn’t have when they were in the world. Why, you couldn’t even have a pig-sticking pageant with them around.”

A lancer got the old Last Man then. He was down, dead on the turf then, with a self-satisfied grin on his face. And an era was over.

Tom the trumpeter blew powerfully and disturbingly again. A lancer killed the pet pig, a very tricky small target. The little pig was stretched out on the turf at the head of the dead Last Man.

Tom blew his powerful half-tune again. Then it was cut off sharply by a lance. He was down dead, and he was placed on the turf at the feet of the dead Last Man.

That was the end of the pig and the boy and the man, and of any secret that they might know.

But an answer to the time of Tom Halfshell arrived then, distantly, but clear and carrying, from ‘over the Hills and far away,’ played on the unplayable trumpet-shell of the Butterfly Moon Slail.

This really was an answer to Tom’s tune, a convincing answer, and it thunderstruck a million men and boys — while seven notes of it sounded

—

— and then — it was cut off sharply — by a murdering lance.

There is no faking a lancing.

And there is no avoiding a countervailing action. A countervailing action is presupposed by an action on this side of the hills, just as matter presupposed antimatter. The anti-creatures in the ‘over the hills and far away’ (OTHAFAs) regions (what was the name of them when they still lived in this plane of the world? — Yes — ‘Women’) they could not let one of their own persons go intuitive and evocative, not any more than could the men on this side of the hill. Silent and sharp murder (how fitting an instrument is the lance!) may be the only possible response in some cases, in the case of a trumpet-call that threatens to play havoc in just seven notes.

If you suppress a secret you must suppress the anti-secret also.

## YOU CAN'T GO BACK

*A note, a musty smell, a tune,  
Some bones and pebbles from the  
moon!*

*Today they set a-flow a spring,  
Remembering, remembering.*

*—The Helen Horn-Book*

One evening in the Latter Days, Helen brought over some bones and rocks that belonged to her late husband John Palmer. She brought the

Helen had married again, and to a man who hadn't known John. Moon Whistle too. And she left all those things with us.

And she thought that she'd better get some of those funny old things out of her house.

"The Moon Whistle will be no good without you to blow it, Helen," Hector O'Day said. She blew it then, very loudly, with her too-big mouth; and there was laughing lightning in her eyes, still undiminished. Then she was away and down the stairs and out of the building with that rush of hers hat was a sort of break-neck tumble.

And she left behind her a tumble of memories of the times when we decades before this, had gone to White Cow Town four times. It had never been crowded in White Cow Town when we were there. It wasn't a place you stumbled over, not unless you were a pretty high stepper.

In Osage County there were some pretty small towns: Bigheart, Hulah, Okeas, Wild Horse, Shidler, White Eagle, Horseshoe, Kaw City, Hog Shooter, Rock Salt, Bluestem, each of these towns being smaller than its fellows. But smaller than any of them was White Cow Town.

There just weren't many people there, and those that were there were pretty narrow. There was a saying "There are no fat people in White Cow Town."

(An informant has just told me that Hog Shooter isn't in Osage County, that it's over the line in Washington County. Not in memory it isn't! The informant must be wrong.)

In these latter days it was Barry Shibbeen, Grover Whelk, Caesar Ducato, Hector O'Day and myself who were together in our card-playing and discussion den when Helen had brought those mementos over.

But back in the old days John Palmer had been with us, and Helen had been there too for the events at White Cow Town, and some of the Bluestems.

That first time, we had ridden up to Bluestem Ranch Number One with Tom Bluestem and his mother in her Buick sedan. The Number One was the oldest of the Bluestem Ranches and was run by Tom's grandparents. They were wonderful people and they said that the place was ours.

The Moon Whistle was hanging on the wall in the ranch-house, and Helen who was a horn-blower and whistle-blower asked if she could blow it.

"Oh, we'll give it to you," Tom's grandmother said, and she handed it to Helen. And Helen blew it loudly.

"Don't blow that damned thing in here!" Grandfather Bluestem shouted. "Take it down to Lost Moon Canyon if you want to blow it. We'll have White Cow Rock breaking in our roof here if it hears it. Oh, that damned whistle!"

This was a surprising outburst, for Grandfather Bluestem was always a friendly and soft-spoken man.

Well, that Moon Whistle did have an eerie and shrill and demanding tone, even a little bit insulting. It was a 'call', and somebody had better answer it.

"I don't know where Lost Moon Canyon is," Helen said.

"Oh, I'll take you all over there," Grandmother Bluestem told us. Barry, Crover, Caesar, Hector, John, Helen, myself, and Tom Bluestem, we all got in the ranch truck and Grandmother Bluestem drove us to Lost Moon Canyon. We were all nine years old except John Palmer who had recent! V had his tenth birthday, and Grandmother Bluestem who said that she was either fifty or a hundred years, she forgot which, she was weak at numbers.

Lost Moon Canyon, through which ran Hominy Creek, was the roughest place on the Bluestem Ranches. There were large and dangerous-looking overhanging rocks, unnaturally large for a canyon no bigger than that, absolutely threatening in their extreme overhang. There was the feeling that one of them was about to fall right down. Then the biggest of those rocks moved, and we howled in near fear.

"Oh, that's only White Cow Rock," Grandmother Bluestem. "It's



different from the other rocks. It's a moon. And it won't fall. It moves slowly. Blow the Moon Whistle, Helen, and it'll come on down."

Helen blew the Moon Whistle (Oh, that damned shrill whistle!), and White Cow Rock descended a hundred feet, with a slow and wobbling motion, and hung right over the ranch truck. There was an upside-down goat standing on the bottom of the big rock, but it didn't seem as if it were going to fall off. There were also some ducks walking upside-down on the bottom of White Cow Rock.

"Let's go up," Tom Bluestem said. "There's a shaft or channel right here in the middle of it, and you can climb through it all the way to the top. You can if you're not afraid. It's scary, but that's all."

"I'm not afraid of anything," Caesar said, "but some things make me kind of nervous. I don't know when anything's made me as nervous as that big, bobbling rock does."

From the top of the cab of the truck we could get to the bottom of the shaft in the rock. Tom Bluestem climbed up that shaft followed by John Palmer, Barry Shibbeen, Grover Whelk, Caesar Ducato, Hector O'Day, myself, and Helen.

"Aren't you coming up too, Grandmother Bluestem?" Helen asked.

"No, I can't," that lady said. "Since I've gotten older I can't do it. There are no fat people on White Cow Rock or in White Cow Town."

As we climbed up the shaft we could see why there were no fat people on top of that rock. That shaft got pretty narrow in some places. It was tricky climbing up it, but not as dangerous as it might seem. There was no place so wide that we couldn't put one hand on each side of the shaft, and there were no smooth or slippery places in it. But it was a very high and long climb and it was pretty dark in there. We had climbed about fifty yards when we came to a short tunnel leading into a little cave.

"We can crawl in here and rest for a little while," Caesar said.

"No, we can't either," Tom Bluestem contradicted. "There's some real mean and peculiar people who live in that nook, and the gnawed bones on the floor of their cave are real weird. Some of them are bones of kids about our age. Let's keep climbing."

"What lives in that cave are gnomes and trolls," Helen said.

"How'd you know?" Barry asked her. "You've never been up here before."

"Every moon everywhere has a family of gnomes or trolls or whatever

their local name is living in the exact center of it,” Helen said. “And all the caves have real weird bones in them, dire wolf bones, woolly rhinoceros bones, human bones, things like that.”

There was sharp, strong smell there. It was the most characteristic smell on the whole of White Cow Moon. We climbed the rest of the way to the top. And then we were in the middle of White Cow Town and in the brightest and friendliest sunshine ever anywhere.

White Cow Rock was a rough, rock-and-clay sphere about a hundred yards in diameter. White Cow Town on the top of the rock had thirteen houses and one store in it. Nine of the houses had out-houses behind them; but the out-houses that had been behind the other four houses had fallen off that rock or moon in times gone by. Of necessity, for there wasn't much level space on White Cow Rock, those out-houses had been built quite a ways down the slope, and sometimes the whole rock wobbled. It had never been very safe to use any of those out-houses of the rears of those lots in White Cow Town.

“I tell you though,” said an elderly citizen of the town, “there comes times, at least once a day, when it's not very safe not to use them either.”

Listen, it was plain magic up on top of that rock or moon. There were never such bright colors or such nourishing air anywhere. The rock was free-floating. It had now drifted about five hundred feet higher in the air and about half a mile to the North. It gave us a good view of both Lost Moon Canyon and the Bluestem Ranch House far below, and you could even see the towers of Pawhuska off in the misty distance north-east. This was much more magical than being up in a balloon even.

All of us had been up in a balloon once, at the Barton's Show Grounds in T-Town. But that balloon was held up by three cables worked by winches, and it rose only about seventy-five feet up in the air. This moon had it beat by a sky mile.

All those houses up on the moon were old-looking and unpainted, but they had a sharpness of outline and a liveliness of detail that isn't to be found in the houses down on Earth. This was like being in really bright daylight for the first time in our lives.

The only animals that the people up on White Cow had were chickens and ducks and goats. The saying about the place should have been amended to say “There are no fat people nor no big animals on White Cow either.” The goats were native to that moon, a man said, and so were

the chickens. The ducks had come there about five hundred years before this, and the people had come about a thousand years ago. But big animals wouldn't have been able to go up that shaft.

The delight and magic of White Cow was just the 'living in the sky' that was the condition there. There was an immediacy, a wininess, a happiness, an exhilaration, a music, a delight about 'living in the sky'.

Four of the men on White Cow worked for the Bluestem Ranches down below, mowing and baling hay, mending fences, moving cattle from one pasture to another, doing whatever workers do on a ranch. One of the women taught at the consolidated school that was between Bluestem and Gray Horse. And nine of the children of White Cow went to that same country school down on Earth. One of the men up there had a still and made moonshine.

"You show me a law that says you can't make moonshine on a moon," he used to challenge people. His still gave a sour-mash smell to the whole moon, but it wasn't the strongest or sharpest smell that they had.

"How can the goats and the ducks walk straight out or even upside down on this rock?" Hector O'Day puzzled to us. "They walk on every part of this sphere."

"It's all a question of gravity," John Palmer said. "A weak gravity will hold little things but not big things. It'll hold goats or ducks on a moon maybe, but it might not hold the people on. One of you lighter kids try walking around this moon to the bottom and up again if you want to. If you don't fall off, then the heavier of us will try it."

"The mathematics of the gravity here is really rum," Barry Shibbeen cut in, but he had that crooked grin on his funny-looking face that meant that he couldn't be trusted. "Recall Foxley's Formula Five, and you'll understand the gravity a little bit better. Think about Edwardson's Elliptical Equation. Remember Mumford's Monotreme!"

"That sounds like a good battle-cry slogan, 'Remember Mumford's Monotreme!'" Grover Whelk giggled. "I wonder what it means."

"I know what Foxley's Formula Five means," Helen contributed, "and it doesn't have anything to do with gravitation. It's for women's sickness and it comes in blue bottles. Mama takes it sometimes."

There was one 'wanted' man who lived in White Cow Town, and the sheriff wouldn't go up there to get him.

"The sheriff is afraid of me," the man said.

“I’m not afraid of any man on Earth,” the sheriff answered when that was reported to him, “and I’ll go anywhere on Earth to get a man. But White Cow Town isn’t on Earth. I’m not afraid of that man. I’m just spooked of those off-Earth places.”

In the general store they had a little radio, home-made, and superior to anything that might be bought. It would get station KVOO fifty miles away in Bristow. It would get it clear and loud whenever White Cow Moon went up more than five hundred feet in the air.

They had Nehi pop in that store, but it cost six cents a bottle instead of a nickel.

“That’s because of the transportation,” the lady said. “We have to get a penny more for it up here than they get of it down on Earth.”

The kids in White Cow Town had a rope and they were playing tug-of-war, but they were playing it like a bunch of sissies. They didn’t show us much pull at all.

“Look,” Barry Shibbeen told them, “there are eight of us and nine of you, and I bet we can out-pull you all over the place.”

“No, there are just seven of you, Barry,” Tom Bluestem said. “Count me out of it.” That was odd. Tom had always been very competitive in all games and sports. Well, there were seven of us then, and there were nine of the White Cow kids, and some of them were quite a bit bigger than we were. And we still pulled them all over the place. We pulled them all over the place until — Well, we pulled them until, if they had let go of that rope, we would have fallen clear off of White Cow Moon. We were that far down on the slope of the sphere.

“Help, Tom, what’ll we do?” we called to our friend, our friend who had been acting a little bit funny and not joining in the game. “When you play tug-of-war up here, the name of the game isn’t checkers,” Tom said. “The name of the game is ‘give-away’.” “Don’t let them give us away,” we wailed. The kids finally dug in and held the rope fast, with the aid of a loop around ‘Last Chance Tree’. We climbed up the rope to safety then. But those moon kids sure laughed and hooted at us a lot after that. We had been beaten about as bad as anybody can be beaten at any game; and we were the smart kids and they were just a bunch of sky bumpkins.

Helen said she was going to stay on that moon forever since they had plenty of the two things she loved the most, duck eggs and goat milk.

“You’ll want to go back home and get your cornet,” John Palmer told

her. "And you can always come back here."

"That's right. I can always come back here," Helen said.

We were adopted by several nations of birds. They gathered on White Cow Moon like clouds, black clouds of crows and blackbirds, gray clouds of doves, brown-and-yellow clouds of larks. There were congregations of cat-birds up there, and of night hawks, even of king birds and mocking birds, and of hawks and eagles. Most of these birds had a contempt for the people of Earth, but they were friendly and genial to the people on the moon.

And there were other things up there that were not quite birds. We didn't know to call them, but they were things of a different wing. And the bones in their nests were as strange and varied as those in the trolls' cave.

Seeding clouds nested on White Cow Moon, and some of them glittered like jewels from all the sparkling water in them. When they wanted to start a shower down below one of them would 'now', another one would say 'now', and a third one would say 'now'. Then they would zoom down and start a shower and spill all over place.

From a hundred feet down in the shaft you could see the stars in the daytime sky.

And this moon was the place where the 'mysterious night lights' nested in the daytime. Almost every rural neighborhood in Osage County has had its own special ghost light for at least a century. These things draw notice, and they scare people. Sometimes they are written up in the news papers, and there is no explanation of them. But, as to where they come from, they come from White Cow Moon. 'Mysterious Night Lights' look funny in the daytime though. You'd hardly recognize them as lights when you see them nesting and confabbing together in the sunlight.

And there were the millions of wonderful jumping fleas on White Cow Moon. Fleas can always jump a little bit further on a moon than they can on Earth. It's a question of gravity.

We played up there till almost dark, and it was one of the finest days of our entire lives. Then we heard Grandmother Bluestem honking the horn of the ranch truck far below and to the south of us. From the top of White Cow Moon when it's high in the sky you can hear a long ways.

Helen blew 'Go down, go down' on the Moon Whistle. She could really blow that thing! And White Cow Moon settled down over Lost Moon Canyon again. We climbed down through the shaft once more (it was a

pretty dark and spooky go of it there), and we finally dropped out of it and onto the top of the cab of the truck. Then we all went back to the Bluestem ranch house.

“But what is it really?” Hector O’Day asked them when we were back in the ranch house and eating a ranch house supper. “Really, I mean.”

That Heck! What did he mean by ‘really’? We had been up into reality, up into blue-sky reality almost all day long. Why the grubby question?

“Oh, it’s just one of the Earth’s moons,” Grandfather Bluestem said.

“How, how?” Hector asked like a gooney. “What one of the Earth’s moons?”

“I don’t have the comparative measures of masses,” Grandfather Bluestem smiled, “but I’d say that it was the smaller of the Earth’s two moons.

“But where did it come from?” Hector still asked.

“Oh, it used to hang out up in Missouri, about a hundred miles southwest of St. Louis,” Grandfather Bluestem said. “Then, when some of the Osage Indians came down here from Missouri in 1802, that moon just followed along after them and came down here too. It had always got along with the Osage people, but it didn’t like most people at all.”

Grandfather Bluestem was a full-blooded Osage, of course.

That hardly touched it. Life on a moon has so many things that just aren’t to be found on Earth at all. It has a special magic. Oh, there are plenty of magics on Earth, but moon-magic is in a different category completely. Every group of kids should have a moon of their own.

But there were other activities and delights. There was an endless tumble of delights for us in those years. In such cases, it is good to keep one particular treasure-house-full of delights in reserve. So we went back to White Cow Moon a few more times in that wonderful old decade.

We went once the summer we were ten years old; once the summer we were eleven; and once when we were twelve years old (we stayed up there three days that time).

It was on that last and longest visit that John Palmer and Barry Shibbeen were able to fill up a gunny sack with stones and bones from the cave of the gnomes or trolls who lived right at the center of that moon.

Barry made a chloroform bomb and he tossed it into that cave and knocked all those strange things out. And John Palmer had made gas masks for himself and Barry. So they put them on and crawled in and

loaded up the sack. A study of those stones and bones was to raise questions that aren't all answered yet.

But, though it was the most magical place on the world, or just off the world, we didn't get back there in those early years, after that long special visit when we were all twelve years old. There were just too many other things to do. We nearly forgot it, the pervading magic of the place, and the strong sharp odor. But it was a buried treasure that the pack of us owned henceforth, a treasure buried a little ways up in the sky.

2

In skies unhigh it still is set.

It's as it's always been... And yet

There's thinnish magic that does cling,

Diminishing, diminishing.

Barry's Shibbeens

Into these latter days again where have all been adults for many aeons.

"Who faked them, who faked them? And how did they do it? Hector O'Day asked on that latter day evening when Helen had brought the bones and stones and the Moon Whistle over to us. Many years had gone by since we had last gone up onto White Cow Moon

"It had to be you and John Palmer, Barry," Hector said. "Both of you were smart as well as book-learned, but how did you fake the bones and stones from that rock, from that rock that you conned us into thinking was a moon?"

"I didn't fake them, and I don't believe that John did," Barry said. "Well yes, they were an odd lot of things. The gnawed bones that we took from that cave were those human children, of bear cubs, of crested eagles, and of certain extinct dog-sized rhinos. They were just the sort of bones, Heck, that you are likely to find in any trolls' cave on any moon. And the fossil stones, they are somewhat stranger. They record a life on that little moon that was quite different and somewhat older than anything on Earth."

"Exquisite fakeries, that's what some of the savants have called the things, Barry'. But they haven't been able to explain how the fakeries were done. Why have they not, exquisite faker, Barry?"

"Because they're not fakes. At least I don't think that they are."

"Just what is the 'core of facts' in the whole business?" Caesar Ducato

asked the bunch of us. “Just what was the thing that we psyched our young selves into believing was a moon? Well, I guess that there was a large and nearly spherical rock in the Lost Moon Canyon area of the Bluestem Ranches. And it did have a fissure in it by which we climbed up onto the top of the rock. And it did have a dangerous wobble to it, or at least some kind of motion. And so we were hypnotized into believing that it was a little moon hanging in low sky. We believed that easily when we were nine years old. What puzzles me is that we still believed it when we were twelve years old and were capable of conceptual thinking. What hypnotism!”

“Who could have hypnotized us and turned our wits moony?” Barry asked. “Several of us were types almost impossible to hypnotize. Who could have conned us into believing that it was a moon, if it wasn’t? But it was.”

“Helen could have hypnotized us into it, Barry. John Palmer could have done it. You could have done it a little bit yourself. The three of you together could certainly have done it —”

“What, what, what? Did you just say ‘But it was’, Barry? But it wasn’t, man. It couldn’t have been.”

“It could have been, yes,” Barry Shibbeen maintained. “The best argument that it was is that it still is. I fly over it sometimes in my helicopter. And I still fly under it sometimes, which is more to the proof. How about all of you flying there with me in the copter in the morning and landing on the little moon? Will that be proof that it’s still there, Hector?”

“Man, it can’t be! It’s physically and psychologically impossible. None of us has even thought that he saw it since we were twelve years old.”

“Wrong, Hector. Tom Bluestem and Julia Flaxfield spent their honeymoon on White Cow Moon ten years after that.”

“But they’re both Indian. And they hadn’t really grown up then, however old they were. They were high on each other then, and it would have seemed to them that they were on a moon wherever they were. Dammit, Barry, there is just no way that a thinking person can accept that there’s a little moon there.”

“Oh, Caesar, and you too, Hector o’ Day, I say that if you can accept the Earth’s regular or big moon, it’s a million times as easy to accept that little moon in the low sky in Osage County. Do you fellows accept the



regular or big moon of the Earth? That so-called moon is an anomaly and the father of anomalies. It's irrational and it's impossible. The only reason we have for believing in its existence is that we've seen it, and that several persons have attested to have been on it. And there is plenty of instrumental evidence for it. But we have better reason to believe in the existence of the little moon. We have seen it at much closer range. Several persons that we know much better (ourselves) have been on it. We have even traversed its dark inner tract. And if electronic waves have been bounced off the larger moon, we have bounced baseballs off the smaller moon. And baseballs are more tangible. Yes, that little moon is real."

"In its psychological involvement with our childhoods it was real, I suppose," Grover Whelk said, "but it wasn't real in any other sense. I'm not sure whether its psychological effect on us was good or bad."

"Somebody should be smart enough to settle this matter," Hector said, "especially to settle your pig-headedness in still believing in it, Barry."

"Oh, I'm smart enough to settle it," Barry proposed. "I've already offered the way to do it, and I offer it again. Let's all get into my copter in the morning and go find that little moon. We'll fly under it and we'll fly over it and we'll land upon it. If we can do these things, then it's real. If we can't do them, then it isn't real. Let's all be ready to take off at a reasonable time of eight-thirty in the morning. Agreed, Cease, Grove, Heck, Al?"

"Agreed," we all said. And that is where we made our mistake.

We called Helen the next morning, but she said that she didn't want to go. "It'd spoil it for me," she said. But her daughter Catherine Palmer ("the child of my old age," Helen always called Catherine) told her mother that she wanted to go, and Helen conveyed the message over the phone. "It will be all right with Catherine," Helen said. "She was born an adult, so it won't do her any harm to know that the moon is a crummy place. But I'm eternally a child and it would shatter me. 'You can't go back', you know."

So Catherine Palmer, a seventeen year old mature adult and a major in psychological anthropology came with us. She was a cheerful kid.

"Oh yeah, I've been up on the little moon before," she said. "I went up there with some of the Bluestem kids the summer before last, but it didn't do much for me. I hadn't yet become psychologically oriented the summer before last. Now I'll have to discover why that little moon did

something for you old fogies, and why some of you think about it and mumble ‘magic!’“

If Catherine hadn’t been so pretty and so seventeenish, she couldn’t have gotten away with that psychological patter.

We took off from the Jenks airport which is closer to T-Town than the T-Town airport is. It also has better facilities for stabling private planes and copters, not being obsessed with all those scheduled commercial flights. It was no more than thirty miles to our destination. Oh, it is pleasant to rattle in a copter over the Green Country on a fine morning in late spring!

“Catherine, I want you to realize that White Cow Moon is a magic place,” Barry almost sang. “I don’t believe that young people have nearly enough magic in their lives now-a-years. Drink deep of it when we get there, Cat.”

“All right.”

“Catherine, yes, it was enchanting,” Hector o’Day said. “I only wish that it was real, that it had been real, that it could be real again. I wish that you could experience the enchantment of it, but I don’t even know how we were able to experience it once. We’d like to offer it to you, but I’m afraid that we don’t have it to offer.”

“Thanks anyhow,” young Catherine said.

“Ah, it was wonder, it was sortilege, it was delight,” Caesar Ducato murmured. “It was a special place. It was the elegance and the charm. And at the same time it was tall magic with all the hair on it. It was the ‘world of our own’, the ‘moon of our own’. It was the place that only the secret masters knew about. So we belonged to the secret masters. It’s a pity that the little moon didn’t exist except in our imaginations.”

“Mr. Ducato, your wattles wobble when you get intense about something,” Catherine said.

“It was the thirst and the slaking at the same time,” Grover Whelk declaimed. “It was the ‘promise fulfilled’. It’s too bad that it never was. But even thinking that we remember it is wonderful.”

“Why not let it stand on its own two abscissae?” Catherine said. She sounded like her mother Helen when she made cracks like that.

“See, it isn’t there!” Hector O’Day cried out, half sad, half gloating, when we had come to the region.

“See, it is there!” Barry Shibbeen countered. “It’s there, with its little

bit different color green, snuggled down almost to Earth over Lost Moon Canyon, nearly invisible among other rocks almost as big and almost the same color. Blow the Moon Whistle, Catherine. Blow the 'Rise up, rise up!' sequence and let's get it up into the sky a ways."

Catherine Palmer blew the Moon Whistle. She had almost as big a mouth as her mother Helen had, and she had an equal talent for blowing all horns and whistles. She blew the sequence, and White Cow Moon wobbled a few hundred feet up into the sky.

"It isn't as big as it used to be," Grover Whelk said sadly.

"Yes it is, Grove," Caesar said with sudden animation. "And it does have that peculiar green color in its topping boscage. It has it yet. I don't quite know the name of that color of green."

"Bilious green, sour bilious green," young Catherine said. She was right of course. White Cow Moon had risen about five hundred feet into the air. Barry Shibbeen flew the copter under several times, and then he hovered it at stand-still under it so we could look up through the old fissure that ran through it from top to bottom. Yes, it sure did look as though White Cow Moon was real and present.

"Well, are you fellows convinced that it's real?" Barry jibed.

"Not entirely convinced," Hector O'Day mumbled thoughtfully. "You have to admit, Barry, that it doesn't look very convincing."

"No, it doesn't," Barry admitted. "I wonder why it doesn't. But it is as big as it used to be. It's still about a hundred yards in diameter,"

"Yes, but the yards aren't as long as they used to be," Whelk complained.

We climbed around and above White Cow Moon. Then we landed in the middle of the top of it. Yes, that strong and sharp odor was still as permeating a presence on White Cow Moon as it had been when we were children. We hadn't realized that it was an unpleasant odor, but we realized it now.

"It smells like a badly-kept zoo," Catherine said. "I think it's the smell of the Greater Yeti or Stinking Yeti. I'll interview him in the interests of science."

There were only four houses left on White Cow Moon, and only one out-house.

"When the last out-house falls off White Cow Moon, I just don't know what will happen to us," an old citizen said. "Extinction, I guess. People

without out-houses just would not be people any longer.”

“I discern the true and unmemorable quality of White Cow Moon now,” Barry Shibbeen said, “but I just can’t set my tongue to the name of it.”

“‘Dingy’ is the word for it,” Catherine said. She was right, of course. I felt a sort of constriction in my throat and chest, and I believe that the rest of them felt it too.

“This moon is full of swamp gas or worse,” Caesar said. “Is Magic itself made of nothing better than swamp gas?”

Catherine took the drinking gourd that was hanging on the town pump and milked it full from one of the she-goats there. The goats all had the mange. The chickens had the mange. Even the ducks on White Cow Moon had the mange now.

“Mother and I both drink a lot of goat milk for our health,” Catherine said. “Oh, it’s sour!”

“Maybe it’s the gourd that’s sour and gives a sour taste to the milk,” Barry said hopefully.

“Nab, it’s the goat herself who’s sour and gives a sour taste to the milk,” Catherine said. “I suppose that the Greater Yeti or Stinking Yeti lives down in that hole that runs through this moon. I’d better go see”

And Catherine Palmer disappeared down the shaft that ran clear through White Cow Moon.

“Well, how does it go on this moon?” Barry asked one of the citizens.

“Badly,” that person said. “The main thing wrong is our shrinking population. There’s only seven people left. A century ago there were a hundred of us here.”

“What’s the next main thing wrong here?” Grover Whelk asked.

“The corruption,” the citizen said. “The trolls or yeti in the middle of our moon have corrupted our children, both of them. They’ve taught them immorality and disobedience and smart talk. It’s those befud dung mushrooms that they grow down there and give our kids to eat that do the damage. Yeah, there goes the future of White Cow Moon blown, completely blown. And the third main thing wrong on this moon is the fleas.”

Fleas! Yes, there were lots of fleas on that moon, and they got all over you and set you to scratching. Well, there had always been lots of fleas there, but they hadn’t seemed so demeaning in the old days.

“If you have trolls or yetis, you’re going to have fleas,” a citizen said. “There’s no way you can miss it.”

Catherine came up out of the shaft then, and a Yeti followed her out. He was eight feet tall, shaggy, quite stringy and spare (there were no fat Yetis on White Cow Moon), and smelly. He was roughly thirty-three and one-third percent of the strong, sharp odor of that moon.

“He’s a genuine Homo Yeti Putens or Stinking Yeti,” Catherine said, “and there’s two more of them, another gentleman one, and a lady one. Even in the interest of science there’s nothing to be got from the Yetis. Nothing, nothing. This one is the least interesting creature I ever saw. I guess he’s harmless though.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” Hector O’Day growled. “How about all those gnawed bones down in your hole, tall fellow? Some of them were bones of human children.”

“If more people gnawed more bones they’d have better teeth,” the Yeti said.

“Ugh, platitudes yet!” Catherine shuddered. And we all felt a bit glum.

“How our great memories have shrunk!” Caesar Ducato lamented.

“It is and it isn’t,” Hector said cryptically. “The moon, I mean. And the way it is, it wouldn’t matter much if it was.”

“Not only has the magic gone out of it, but nothing else has taken its place,” Barry Shibbeen mourned. “What’s the word for this place? Oh yes, ‘dingy’. I could cry.”

“If you cry a tear down into the fissure, it will fall all the way through, and if a sky person should look down and see it through the hole it’d look like a star in the daytime,” Catherine said with sudden poetic insight.

Young Catherine Palmer blew ‘Retreat’ on the Moon Whistle. We all got into the copter and rattled away from there.

‘You can’t go back’ the proverb says.

And it’s a good thing you can’t.

## SQUARE AND ABOVE BOARD

The people were young and the season was springtime.

It was said of young Midas Muldoon that he was a complex man, but this was a lie. He was as straightforward as a crooked man could be. He wanted power, he wanted prestige, and he wanted whopping wealth. He wanted to be envied. He wanted to be hated and admired at the same time. He wanted to make people crawl. He wanted to make people quake in fear. Certainly those were all straightforward aims, and in Midas there was never any element of concealment.

Midas had been given his curious name by his father Croesus Muldoon, a confidence man who always swore that he would live and die in a great stone castle. And he did die in a great stone castle of sorts, one of the outskirts of McAlester Oklahoma. Midas, like his father, liked to bet. And he liked to fight. He was athletic, magnetic, and champion at the game of checkers or draughts.

In contrast to Midas, his best friend Cristopher Kearny was an intricate and convoluted fellow. He often stopped to think things over, and you can get eaten alive doing that. This being-eaten-alive was never fatal to Cris however. For him, it was one way of getting to the very inside of a situation, or a corporation. He was an inventor, a promoter, an investor. He had only a nominal lust for wealth, and yet he began to acquire rapid wealth while still quite young; and he did this by being an insider in very many ways.

Cris was not athletic; he was not magnetic (he said that only the base metals were magnetic); and he was not a checkers champion. His game was chess. He did not like to fight, or bet. He won a lot of bets, it's true, some of them large ones, some of them from Midas Muldoon. In these cases however Cris was not betting. Midas was always betting, but Cris was always riding an inside sure thing. Midas Muldoon and Cristopher Kearney were rivals in many things.

One of the things that they were rivals for was Bridie Caislean, a very pretty and devious and intelligent girl. And Midas Muldoon always seemed to be very far ahead on this particular rivalry.

When Cris Kearny was twenty-two years old, his auditor Linus Caislean told him that he had just become a millionaire.

"It couldn't have happened to a nicer fellow," Linus said, "nor could

the other good news that Bridie has just told me of you have happened to a nicer fellow. I heartily welcome you in-to the family.”

Something about this came very near to puzzling Cris, but he hadn't become a millionaire at twenty-two by allowing himself to be puzzled very much or very long. So when Bridie Caislean came into Cris' little office exactly one minute after her father Linus Caislean had walked out of it. Cris looked at her and asked her only one word: “When?”

“There's two things I like about you, Cris honey,” Bridie said. “One of them is that you catch onto things quick. The other one is that you're a millionaire now. I've been doing the work on your account for papa, you know. Oh, one month from today, the first day of June we'll get married. Midas Muldoon will whip you when he hears about it, of course. He may even kill you. That's the day when he was supposed to marry me, and he doesn't know any different yet.”

“Midas will neither whip me nor kill me, but neither will he give you up as easily as that. He'll stay in the race all the way down to the wire, and he's especially tricky in the hack-stretch. But there's no way that he can acquire a million dollars within a month; and I can't think of anything that could hook you better than a million dollars.”

“Neither can I,” Bridie Caislean said.

Bridie herself was quite magnetic. She had sufficient of base metal, iron and steel, in her for that. She also had an amalgamated heart: one part pure gold, one part quick mercury, and eight parts brass.

Bridie had been beauty queen at North-Central State A & M Tech (she'd have been beauty queen even at Harvard if she'd gone there) and she was an extravagantly attractive girl. She was as straightforward in her aims as was Midas Muldoon, and she had a talent for being on the inside of things that was at least equal to that of Cris Kearny. She was full of fun and interests, and she was the only thing that Cris had ever envied Midas. Now he was quite pleased to be marrying her. “What are you thinking about, dear?” Bridie asked Cris one sunny day during their engagement.

“Oh, of all the ancient terrors,” Cris said, “of the Sea Monster that is the most primordial of the terrors, of the loathsome and murderous disease that will be diverted from its victim only by another victim, of ghosts that return with the sea-wrack of their deaths still on them. And most of all I was thinking of the terror of falling, though in the sunny little day-dream reverie I've just been having the fall is only a piddling

thousand feet. But the terror of falling is the most over-riding terror of them all. Did you know that even bright Lucifer, a winged creature, was so terrified of the depths before him that he forgot to use his wings and so fell like lightning?”

“Cris, Cris, maybe you are just terrified of marrying me.”

“Fear of marriage is one of the ancient terrors, yes, but it’s a minor one of them. But strangely enough, in my afternoon daydream, I do not marry you.

“Then throw that daydream away. It’s flawed. Forget it. Is your cousin Cohn Kearny coming to our wedding, have you heard? I’ve phoned him. He says that he may come. I just believe that I will phone him again and make sure that he comes. Hey, we sure did get acquainted fast on that transatlantic telephone!”

“How did you know that I had a cousin named Cohn Kearny?”

“How did I know that you have a cousin who has five times as much money as you have? Honey, would I miss something like that when I was running a check on you? I’m thorough. Two million Irish pounds, and a Castle in Ireland besides. Oh, I’ll get him to come somehow!”

“Bridle, in your slippery little mind you’re not thinking of switching to a man you’ve never even seen? You’re capable of it.”

“Of course I’m capable of it, but I’ll stick to Plan A for the moment at least, and you’re Plan A. You are Colin’s first cousin. He has a terminal disease that will allow him to live less than two years more. How sad that it should happen to one so young! You are his only kindred in the world, and he has not made a will yet. That must be remedied. He must come to our wedding and he must make his will to us.”

“How do you know that he hasn’t made his will?”

“Oh, I learned that from a chatterbox young lady who works for Cohn’s lawyer in Cork. There’s lots of information to be garnered by transatlantic phone. I learned too that the name of his Castle, Cearnog Ficheall, means the Chess Squares. The chatterbox who laughs with a brogue told me that it’s because the Castle is above Chess Square Valley where there are alternate fields of light flax and dark hops that look like a checkerboard. And every seven years they change them and grow the hops where the flax had been and the flax where the hops had been. The chatterbox and myself have become great friends. I asked her how much she weighed and she said fifteen stone. Fifteen stone translates into



pounds as 'fat'. The ideal world is one in which all the girls except myself are fat. Why didn't you tell me that you had a cousin with two million Irish pounds, a castle, and a terminal disease!"

"All three are recent acquisitions. Until a year ago he was only a poor relation in the castle of a rich uncle. And the name of the Castle, Cearnog Ficheall or Chess Squares, is really an euphemism for Cearnog Fuil or Bloody Squares. Cearnog is our family name 'Kearny';, and it does mean a square, or squares."

"How apt, beloved square! How opportune! Oh, things will go swimmingly!"

And things did go swimmingly, right up to the eve of the wedding, even though Bridie hadn't been able to get Cousin Cohn to make a will during the week he had been in town.

"Oh, I couldn't will such a monstrous castle and the monstrous entailments that accompany it to two such nice people as you and Cris," Cousin Colin always said. "No, no, you two have become much too dear to me for that."

"The more monstrous the castle the better," Bridie insisted. "It isn't any prosaic castle that I intend to inherit. Does it have a ghost?"

"Indeed it does, half a dozen ghosts, and the bones of some of them are still far below the castle on the rocky and forbidding shore. It's quite a fall that they take when they go through the floor in the Great Checker-board Dining Hall of the castle. It breaks almost every bone they have. And then the Sea Monster (he's carried on the Castle Rolls as the 'Old Retainer of the Castle') comes and strips all the flesh off of the new bones. The whole situation has given the castle something of a bad name.

"You're being droll, Cousin Colin," Bridie said. "My own name, Bridie Caislean, means both Brigid of the Castle or Bride of the Castle, and I insist that my name shall be fulfilled. See! I already have done all the work. I have the will drawn up here. All you have to do is sign it."

"Some days I just don't believe in siting documents after noon."

"But yesterday you said that some days you don't believe in signing documents before noon, and then I never could find you after noon."

"Some days it's one way, Bridie, and some days it's the other way, Cousin Colin said.

But it was Midas Muldoon who struck up an exceptionally close friendship with Colin Kearny during the week that Colin was in town

before the wedding of Cris and Bridle. They played checkers together a lot. Midas said that he was champion of America. Cohn said that he was champion of Ireland and of all Europe as well as the Straits Settlements and Madagascar and Patagonia. Colin had sought his fortune in the latter three places while he was in his late teens. They played very close, and a canny observer would have noticed that both of them were holding back a little bit.

Then, at Cris' bachelor party the night before the wedding, Midas and Colin tied one on together. It was quite sloppy, but here also an astute observer might have noticed that each was holding something back. They slashed their arms and mingled their blood and became blood brothers forever. It was that kind of bash. Then they began to play checkers for extravagant stakes, though each of them seemed to have trouble even seeing the board. They played for such high stakes as almost to preclude their being serious.

Finally, when the fiasco had run its course, Midas Muldoon had won the Castle in Ireland as well as the two million Irish pounds from Colin. And Colin just happened to have deeds and assignment papers in his pockets, and he spread them out to sign everything over to Midas. Then Cris pulled Cohn aside.

"Cousin Colin, I cannot allow this nonsense to go any further," Cris said. "Do not sign anything. Not anything."

"Don't spoil it, Cris," Cousin Colin said in a low voice, and he was totally sober. "Don't spoil it now. Oh, I've conned this fellow into becoming blood brother of me, and he thinks he's conned me into it. I've conned him into taking deed to the castle and taking conveyance to the two million Irish pounds that are one of the entailments of the castle. And he never even suspects, Cris. Oh, I love myself when I pull a smart one like this. It gives me top pleasure to outsmart people."

"However have you outsmarted Midas Muldoon, Cousin Colin! There's been a horrible mistake."

"I love you, Cousin Cris, when you pretend not to understand a trick like this," Cousin Colin chortled. "Oh wonderful, wonderful! Don't spoil it."

So the mysterious business was consummated.

Bridle Caislean came by Cris' place and waked him quite early the next morning. Cris was pleasantly befuddled from the Imperial Irish

Brandy (a gift of Cousin Colin) that they had indulged in the night before, and he had a feeling that something had gone amiss. And he did not, for the barest moment there, quite catch the import of Bridle's chatter.

"There is no reason for Midas and I to be out expense when everything for a luxury wedding is already standing ready and is already paid for by you, Cris," Bridle was saying. "I've always loved your habit of paying all extraordinary expenses immediately and on the spot. And Midas and I can use the same airplane tickets and hotel reservations (how nice that you paid them in advance) for our honeymoon just as Nell as you and I could have used them.

"You and Midas Muldoon?" Cris asked.

"Well sure," Bridle bubbled. "Midas won the Castle and the two million Irish pounds from Cousin Colin (that's about five million American dollars, with a Castle thrown in), so of course I'm marrying Midas instead of you this morning. There's a sort of poetic justice here too. This is the day I was supposed to marry Midas in the first place, before I was supposed to marry you, and now I'm supposed to marry him again. Isn't it nice that things always work out so nice for me!"

So this other not-too-mysterious business was consummated also. Midas Muldoon and Bridle Caislean were married that morning. And Cristopher Kearny was left with an empty sort of feeling.

It was just one year later that Bridle Muldoon phoned Cris Kearny from Castle Cearnog Ficheall in Ireland.

"Come and visit us, Cris, and the sooner the better," she said. "We are so happy here that we want to share our happiness with somebody, and as the best friend of both of us you are the logical choice. If you start sometime today you can be here sometime tomorrow."

"That'd be a good slogan for a travel agency to use. What's your angle, girl of a thousand angles?"

"No angle, Cris. This is the new Bridle. I'm kind, I'm benevolent, unselfish, altruistic, and one other word that I forget. Where's your gambling instinct? Come and take a chance on a visit to us."

"I never gamble, Bridle. I go only for sure things."

"It's a sure thing that we want to see you, Cris. Do come."

Chris left sometime that day and his plane was over Ireland sometime the next day. From the air he saw the checkerboard of light and almost white fields of flax and of dark and almost black fields of hops. He saw

the Castle (for they were already in their descent), and something twanged in his heart-strings like a harp tuned a little bit flat. It may have been the piles of whiteness on the stoney shore below the Castle that gave him the queer flat feeling. And no more than twenty miles from the Castle he was down at Cork International Airport.

He went first to the office of a lawyer in Cork. This was the lawyer of Cousin Colin, and he was also the lawyer of Cris Kearny now, for Irish affairs at least. The lawyer was not in, but the lawyer's assistant was full of news and good cheer and advice.

"Remember that you are in Ireland now," said this assistant who was a merry and ample person who laughed with a brogue. "This place is full of draiocht."

"Yes, draiocht, magic, especially the voices of the people," Cris agreed.

"Moreover you are in County Cork. And here, especially in the castles and the crags, it is likely to be the draiocht dorcha."

"Oh yes, dark magic or baleful magic. And what do you recommend to ward off this dark or baleful magic, lawyer assistant?"

"Chicken blood. I'll draw some for you from the cock in the yard before you leave. And be advised also that the terminal disease, called here only the 'loathsome disease', can be entailed along with the castle, like any other entailment, onto the new owner of the castle. If the entailment rite is not broken, then the new owner will have the fatal disease, and the old owner will have it no longer. And the new and entailed owner of the castle will die of the disease within two years. Medical science now confirms that this really happens."

"I'm a great admirer of medical science myself. Is there a specific against the entailment of the loathsome disease? And how is Cousin Colin these days?"

"Chicken blood is the specific against the loathsome entailment, as it is against so many other things. I'll draw some for you from the cock in the yard before you leave. And your Cousin Colin is presently vacationing in foreign parts. Rio, I believe, is the name of the place. He had several recent fortunes that were not entailed, you know. He has willed them to you, but you may have to wait a hundred or more years to inherit them considering the exuberant and brawny health he has enjoyed for this last year. Remember too, Cristopher Kearny, that old precept: 'Beware of the Overseas Irish hearing Castles'."

“I thought it was: ‘Beware of Greeks bearing Gifts’.”

“Same thing. Look at an Overseas Irishman sideways and he could just as well be a Greek. You will be offered a castle, yes, and its double entailment, aye, and a thousand years free supply of bones on the shore below it into the bargain. When you accept the deed to the castle you will sign a very curious codicil to that deed.”

“How do you know that it is a curious codicil, lawyer’s assistant?”

“Oh, I drew it up for them at the castle. This entailed gift will come about through the bloody swearing of the blood-brotherhood and through the checker-playing in big Checkerboard Hall. When you play those dire games of checkers you will lose if you lose, and you will only seem to win if you win. If you win you will lose by dying of the loathsome terminal disease within two years.”

“And again, lawyer’s assistant, is there not a specific against this terrible misfortune of the checker games turning against me and gobbling me up?” What a pleasant and roomy person this lawyer’s assistant was!

“Once again the specific against this luckless gaming is chicken blood. I’ll draw some for you from the cock in the yard before you leave. And there is one square in Checkerboard Hall on which the Master of the Castle has himself placed when he is in his last agony from the loathsome disease. At the moment of his death, the square opens and dumps him on the rocks a thousand feet below: and a friendly Sea Monster comes and strips the flesh from the bones. It’s a good arrangement. Persons dying of the loathsome disease may not be buried in Irish Ground lest they contaminate it. And they become so smelly when left unburied. Some of the bones are from old guests who were robbed and had their throats cut by old Castle Masters; and then, being placed on the dire square, they were likewise dumped at their death moment and had their bones stripped.”

“All Irish castles have mottos. What is the motto of this Casfie Cearnog Ficheall, lawyer’s assistant?”

“The motto of Castle Cearnog Ficheall is Cearnog Agus Cionn Mhord or ‘Square and Above Board’. And yet with a different intonation and a different viewpoint, that out of the eyes of a dead person on the stoney shore below the Castle for instance, the motto could as well be Englished ‘Och, That Square in the Board Above!’ and this would be in the tone of a warning. And now you must be going if you’re to be in time for supper at

the Castle. But first we'll gather the blood."

Out in the yard, the lawyer's assistant drew a small sackful of blood from the cock. It stood still for the drawing, and then it crowed in a loud voice.

The lawyer's assistant drew a second sackful of blood from the cock. It stood still for the drawing, and then it crowed in a weak voice.

The lawyer's assistant drew a third sackful of blood from the cock. It stood still for the drawing, and then it crowed in a sad and broken voice and fell over dead.

"He'll be good for after-midnight supper tonight," the lawyer's assistant said. "I love blooded rooster roasted on a spit. My mother will pluck it and draw it and roast it and have it ready. I'll drive you to the castle now. It's but twenty miles or thirty dlomeadgir. Och, it's no trouble. I often drive that far in a single week."

The lawyer's assistant got Cris to the Castle at suppetime.

"How old are you, lawyer's assistant," Cris Kearny asked.

"I'm twenty-two this springtime, and everyone else in the world is twenty-three," she said. "How ideal! I'll be back for you about midnight. Your business at the Castle should be consummated by then."

Then she laughed, with a brogue.

Cristopher Kearny blew the burnished trumpet that was set into the front door of Castle Cearnog Ficheall or Chess Squares Castle, and at the same time he splatted one sack of the cock's blood on the same door as a specific against misfortune coming to him within.

Then Midas Muldoon flung the door open, and Bridle and Midas greeted him with great affection. Oh, they made big over him, and they showed him all around the wonderful Castle. He saw everything that could be seen by torchlight. Bridle even introduced him to three of the Castle Ghosts. These were quite urbane and pleleaant entities and somewhat more at their ease than were Midas and Bridie Muldoon. The Muldoons seemed to have just a touch of the jitters.

And then it was no time at all till they were all sat down to a wonderful supper in the Great Checkerboard Dining Hall. There is something excessively black-and-whitish about the term 'checkerboard', but in the Dining Hall it was not so. The great squares (each the dimension of the First Master of the Castle and he had been a tall man) were royally colored. The white was really a sort of golden ivory, and the black was

really midnight ocean-blue with touches of French Lilac and Royal Purple. And by the torchlight of the Dining Hall (Irish Castles have electricity only in the bathrooms; it would be a vulgar intrusion anywhere else) the effect was enchanting.

The courses of that supper were like a litany of the great dishes of 'Supper in Heaven': Gamecock, Rampant Ram, Truculent Trout (each trout glared at one with angry and living eyes from the plate, but that could only have been the effect of the torchlight), Gored Ox, Young Foal of Horse: what great dishes they were on that supper table! There were seven sorts of brandy to go with the seven courses, and seven little piles of snuff were on the serviette at each place.

Seven brandies made each of them a little drunk and more than a little effusive. There came the moment when Midas Muldoon insisted that he and Cristopher should slash their forearms and mingle their blood and so become blood brothers.

Cris was thankful that it was night as he worked his bloody deception with the second sackful of blood. The outcome, of course, was that Midas Muldoon became blood-brother of a cock that was two-and-a-half hours dead. Had it been otherwise, the loath-some disease would have passed out of the blood of Midas and into that of Cris as part of the deecing-and-entailment rite.

And then the supper was cleared away, and a checkerboard and more brandy brought. And Midas suggested that they play checkers for moderately high stakes and for the championship of America and Ireland and all Europe as well as the Straits Settlements and Madagascar and Patagonia, which latter string of titles Midas had won from Colin Kearny just one year before. Cris agreed, but first (thankful again that they had naught but torchlight) he went to one of the squares of the great checkerboard floor (the lawyer's assistant had told him which one it would be) and dribbled a little blood from the third sack on it.

"Be careful of that one square, Cris honey," Bridle warned. "It's — ah — a little precarious."

Then Cris sprinkled the remainder of the third sack of blood on the checkerboard on which they were to play.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Midas," he said. "It is only some of our brotherhood blood that was still on my arm."

"Wonderful, wonderful," Midas Muldoon gloated. "Twill make the

rite all the more binding.”

They played, and Cris won. They played, and Cris continued to win. They played, and Cris won bigger and bigger bets. They played, and Cris won Castle Cearnog Ficheall itself from Midas Muldoon as well as two million Irish pounds in entailment with the Castle and also ‘a more intimate entailment sealed in the blood of undying brotherhood’. The Castle and attending kale consolidated all Midas’ losses for the evening.

Bridle Muldon had all the papers ready. Cris received the deed to the Castle and the assignment of the two million pounds. And in turn he signed a codicil to each paper, to the deed, and to the assignment. The codicil to the deed said that Cris would not take possession of the castle until two years and one day had gone by; and in case of his untimely death before that time, ownership of the Castle would revert to the Muldoons. The codicil to the assignment of the two million pounds said that the money would be held in escrow by a legal firm in Cork for two years, and one day, after which it would be paid to Cris Kearny; but in case of the untimely death of Mr. Kearny before that time, the money would be returned to the Muldoons.

“It’s all pro forma stuff, honey,” Bridle said. “You don’t even need to read it if you don’t want to. Just sign it.”

“Fine, fine,” Cris laughed as he signed the codicils. “All Square and Above Board.”

“How odd that you should use that phrase,” Midas commented. “You could not have known it, but that is the motto of this Castle Cearnog Ficheall which you now own tentatively.”

“Haven’t you grown skinnier since your marriage, Bridle?” Cris asked.

“Not at all. I’ve gained two stone since I’ve been married. That’s twenty-eight pounds. Subconsciously I did it for you. I remember you used to say that I was perfect but that I would be even more perfect if I were a bit more ample. And now I am that.”

“Somehow you seem skinnier, Bridle,” Cris said.

Daydreams of amplitude. Rather, waking torchlight night dreams of amplitude. The beauties of spaciousness. Why was Cris musing on such things?

At midnight the trumpet that was inset in the front door blew the angriest tune that ever was heard, like a signature tune of somebody.

“That is a friend who is taking me back to Cork tonight,” Cris said. “I’ll



look in on you at the Castle again tomorrow perhaps.”

“Wonderful!” Midas shouted. “It’s been wonderful to see you again, Cris.”

And after Cris had left, Midas shouted still more loudly: “Wonderful, wonderful! Now I have transmitted the fatal loathsome disease to Cris through the botherhood rite and the entainment rite. And I am free of the sickness, and he will die of it before two years have gone by. And the Castle and the funds will revert to us. Nothing can go wrong, nothing.”

“Nothing can go wrong for me at least,” Bridle shouted inwardly to herself. “Even if this trick doesn’t work, it will work for me. Even if the disease somehow was not transmitted, even if Midas dies of it instead of Cris, I can always marry Cris. He loves me eternally, and nobody else can ever take my place with him. Maybe it will be even better for me if this doesn’t work. Then I will have all the fortunes of both Midas and Cris. Isn’t it nice that things always turn out so nice for me!”

But Bridle was wrong about nobody ever being able to take her place. And she’d be furious when she found out who it was. Bridle had the beauty, yes, but beauty wasn’t everything.

There were such things as amplitude, as Cris realized when he got into the car with the lawyer’s assistant at midnight and had an ample kiss from her. There were such things as spaciousness, and merriment. There were even such things as that business of laughing with a brogue.

Oh, Bridie was beautiful, but Sharon (Sharon McSorley was the name of the lawyer’s assistant) would make two of her with a bit left over. And you can’t have too much of a good thing.

They plighted their troth over an after-midnight supper of rooster hot from the spit, and Spanish sherry.

“When we move into the Castle, in two years and a day, I’m going to make only one change,” said full-bodied Sharon. “I’m going to fix that tricky square in Checkerboard Dining Hall so that nobody will ever exit that way again. I’ve already told the Sea Monster. He says that he can get by on bodies as seldom as one every seven years, but I’ve told him that there’ll be no more at all. He thinks that he may get another appointment at a Castle that overhangs Dingle Bay in Kerry County. Sea-rumor says that there’s a good fall of bodies from that Castle. I’ve told the Castle Ghosts that they may remain after we move in. They are pleased entirely with the arrangement. They say that it’s always been the case that when

the Castle has an ample mistress there will be merry times in the old place.”

## IFRIT

I am Henry Inkling, newspaper reporter and feature story writer. I am the best around here, but I never seemed to have anything to show for it until quite recently, within the last several days. It was always the expenses of keeping up my life style that swallowed up everything I could make.

But now I've whipped that. Now I have a beautiful home on a beautiful lake. I have stunning mountains rising right out of my own back yard. I have food and drink beyond anything I ever imagined before. And my friends and visitors are absolutely astonished by my setup. I have elan, I have style, I have class. I have become the hottest host in the newsy fraternity in town, and I never knew that adulation could be heaped so high. My evenings-at-home are probably the most cultural in town and likely the most boozy, and they are certainly the most In-Groupy. And the whole business doesn't cost my anything at all. Everything I earn goes straight into the bank now. I don't need it, but it seems like a good idea to put it somewhere. Not only do I have no new expenses at my new and luxurious setup, but I have no expenses at all. Allis free. I have it made. This change of life and change of circumstance began about two weeks ago when editor Sandow X Moshla gave me a story to do.

"Wrestling," he said. "I'm sorry, Henry, but the wrestling shows advertise pretty big in the papers, and we try to do a wrestling special once a year. Do this, and I'll give you a really good assignment the day after tomorrow. Ugh, wrestling, ugh!"

"Ugh," I said. "Well, at least there can't be anything new in wrestling. We've had the Wild Man of Borneo who was wheeled up to the ring in a cage. We've had Number 131-3 arriving with his handcuffs and his ball-and-chain and his prison-striped trunks. We've had Le Canonnier with his brass cannon that he was always wheeling around and pointing at his opponent while he almost got it torched off with a burning fuse. We've had Hayfield Hooligan with the giant bale of hay in his comer which he always cut open and scattered around the ring. He was the only one who could keep his footing when the ring was knee-deep in hay. We've had the Hangman with that little gallows on wheels, and the rope with its noose that he was always trying to put around his opponent's neck to hang him

right there in the ring. Is there anything new this year?”

“There’s the Weeping Genii, Henry. He arrives as the Genii in the bottle. His manager carries him into the ring in a half-gallon bottle. Then he takes the cork out of it, and the Genii pours out. He’s about as big as a squirrel at first, but then he expands till he’s six-foot-nine and three hundred and eighty pounds. He can’t wrestle much, but he’s good show. I’m sorry, Henry, but he’s about the only new thing in wrestling this year.”

“How could he do that?” I asked. It hit me a little odd. “How could his manager carry him into the ring in a half-gallon bottle and then have him expand to such a size as that?”

“Oh, it’s all a fake, Henry. You know that everything in professional wrestling is a fake.”

So that night I went out to the Junior Pavilion at the Fairgrounds to see the wrestling matches. Sure they were all fakes, but they were good show and they drew the crowd along with them.

Lord Stamford Heather-Rose had his valet spray the ring out of a commercial-sized crop sprayer that had the words “Attar of Roses” lettered on it. Then his opponent Josh Pole-Cat had his valet spray the ring with an even larger sprayer that had the words “Essence of Skunk” stenciled on it. Josh Pole-Cat was the good guy for that evening, however, and Lord Stamford Heather-Rose was the villain. And Josh won it all in about that degenerated into something very near to straight wrestling.

Horseshoe Jones was matched with Rexford “The Lawyer” Pettifogger in the next bout. Horseshoe always seemed to have a horseshoe in his hand, and he brandished it as a weapon. As many horseshoes as the referee took away from him, Horseshoe always seemed to come up with one more. Rexford “The Lawyer” Pettifogger had an equally never-failing supply of large writs with the words “Legal Writ. Cease and desist!” written on them so big that everyone in the Pavilion could read them easily. The Lawyer would hand one of these big writs to his opponent, Horseshoe Jones. Horseshoe was a slow reader. He read letter by letter rather than word by word, and about the time that his finger finally came to the last letter, “The Lawyer” would knock him down with a whanging blow right on the button. But Horseshoe would always come up off the mat with another horseshoe in his hand, and they would go at it again.

The Weeping Genii was in the semi-final match against Battering Ram

Bently, and I felt a curious excitement as they got ready for that bout. Battering Ram came into the ring with his manager. And then the other manager seemed to come into the ring alone. He carried several towels and a half-gallon bottle. Then, when the referee motioned the wrestlers to come to the center of the ring, the Genii's manager pulled the cork out of that bottle, and the Genii poured out of it. Sure enough, he was only about as big as a squirrel at first, and then he expanded to six-foot-nine-inches and three hundred and eighty pounds. The two wrestlers joined battle. And nobody seemed at all amazed by the unbottling trick. Well, it amazed me.

"How did they do that?" I asked a lady next to me.

"Oh, it's all a fake," the lady said. "You know that everything in professional wrestling is a fake. Yi, yi, yi, kill him, kill him, kill him, Genii!"

"How in the world did that huge creature come out of that little bottle?" I asked the lady on the other side of me.

"Oh, they borrowed that from the Arabian Nights that we read when we were little," the lady said. "It's all a trick, of course. You know that everything in professional wrestling is a trick. Wow, wow, wow, gouge his eyes out, Weeper! Break him in two, Battering Ram!"

The Weeping Genii wept when the Battering Ram battered him around, and it was good show to see that great hulk crying like that. And yet the Genii had the better of it, and he won the bout. He was popular. The Battering Ram was the good guy and the Genii was the villain. But he was a villain that everybody liked. And after his hand had been raised in victory, he diminished and entered into the half-gallon battle again. And his manager corked the bottle and carried it away with him. And still nobody seemed to regard it as an extraordinary trick.

I didn't stay to see the main event. I followed the manager with his bottled Genii. I had to get an interview with them. I caught up with them in the dining room of the Fairmont Mayo downtown. The manager had a fine meal already spread out before him. And the Genii in the bottle also seemed to have a fine meal spread out before him, on a banquet table not even an inch long. The Genii had a lot of room to move about in that bottle.

"I want an interview with either or both of you!" I said. "Nobody else seemed to pay much attention to it, but yours is the slickest trick that I

ever saw in my life.” “It’s a little too sophisticated for the common people,” the manager said, “but it’s a good trick and I have my livelihood from it.” He took the cork out of the bottle. “I’ll answer any question you want to ask, as will my associate, Ifrit the Genii. But he’s a little hard to hear in his smaller state. You’d just about have to get down on his mensural level to hold conversation with him. You may as well ask me what you have on your mind first.”

“How does the Genii grow small, or how do you make him grow small?” “It only works for persons of honest heart,” the manager said. “Persons of good heart, whether of the Genie or the human sort, have only to say four words in Arabian, ‘El-hadd el-itnein el-talat el-arba, and they will grow small quickly, but not so quickly as to bewilder them.”

“You said the words and you did not grow small,” I charged. “No, I’m a black-hearted and dishonest-hearted person. I don’t know what you are. But, so that you will not find yourself marooned, let me tell you that to grow large again you must say three other Arabian words: ‘El kharnis el-goma el-sabt.’“

“That’s the damnedest spoof I ever heard of,” I said.

“Try it,” the manager told me. “If you are of brave heart as well as honest heart, try it. You have nothing to lose except your own orientation and perhaps your life. And you stand to gain a whole new way of looking at things.”

“El-hadd el-itnein el~talat el-arba.” I spoke the words bravely. No. I didn’t begin to grow smaller. Everything else in the world began to grow larger. I climbed onto the enlarging table. I hooked my fingers over the rim of the mouth of the bottle. And when I was in the bottle and had become stabilized in my smaller size, I conducted an interview with Ifrit the Genii. In this I use the form Genii for the singular and Genie for the plural. I know that’s incorrect, but that’s Ifrit’s usage and that of the other Genie.

MYSELF: Just what is a Genii?

IFRIT: We are a species a little lower than the Angels. To put it bluntly, we’re a species a little bit lower than almost everything. There are three races of the Genii, the Gul who are always male, the Ifrit who may be either male or female, and the Sila who are always female. I am a male Ifrit. Ifrit is not my personal name. We do not have personal names. But that is what my manager calls me for want of something better, and that

is what you may call me for convenience.

MYSELF: How in the world do the Gul who are all male or the Sila who are all female have offspring?

IFRIT: Mostly by the natural method. Some of them have their births by section, though. And some of them give birth under hypnosis or anesthesia, much as do humans. But in the beginning it was always the natural method.

MYSELF: This is quite luxurious here, Ifrut. This seems to be a larger place by the moment. It's a real manor house you have here. This veranda is as big as a castle by itself. How does it all come about?

IFRIT: I carve some of the things out of little pieces of wood when I'm in my larger form. Rough carving is all that's needed. And my manager buys some of the little things in toy stores and drops them into the bottle. Then, when I come into the bottle, the things are no longer little, and they're no longer rough. They become perfectly arranged and perfectly formed. And they become incredibly detailed. New details add themselves from only shadowy hints or from none at all.

MYSELF: But that's beyond all reason and nature. That's magic.

IFRIT: Oh sure. Magic on a small scale is always freely given, and we make use of it by going on a small scale ourselves. That grand piano there, it's of concert quality. And yet the original of it was only a penny piece of plastic out of a crackerjack box. But, as we say, there's really nothing magic about magic. It is the natural ambient of us Genie.

MYSELF: Are you the slave of your manager? Is he your master?

IFRIT: Oh, I suppose so. The arrangement is a pretty good one. A Genii can only have one manager at a time, and if he has a good master, he's safe from falling under the dominion of a bad one. Mine is a pretty good master, and I have a good life. In two-thirds of the towns on the circuit I'm visited by others of my kind. We have our own methods of getting together. And I have my books and my records here, more than ten thousand of each. I have my flute and my violin and my piano. I have all the best to eat and drink. I have my correspondence. We have our own bottle-to-bottle instant mail service. The phrase 'A message found in a bottle' has more meaning than you'd believe. And I have several hundred human friends who have mastered their fear and who visit me on my estate here. Even my gladiatorial combats are rather fun. It is to play the 'Giant of the First Kind' in a miming form of comic drama when I do the

wrestling. There are also times when I become a ‘Giant of the Second kind’, a giant who is more than a mile tall. Oh, we’re a prodigious people.’ And when I look up from my estate here, it is the humans who are the giants. Sometimes a bunch of them look like a skyful of giants to me. We Genie may always have masters because we belong to an inferior race.

MYSELF: But what about the Genie who are slaves to bad masters?

IFRIT: Oh, they have a bad time of it. There’s a breaking point, but it’s so final a breaking point that it’s never been used yet. If you ever get a Genii completely in your power, Henry, don’t push him to the limit. Every Genii knows a word he can say that will bring the world to its end. It’s a dangerous and fearful situation.

MYSELF; What is the word, Ifrit?

IFRIT; It’s El-jhokholimfhorad — Oh, no, no, no. I almost said the direful word. If I’d gone on and said the last eleven syllables of it, the world would have come to its end. Never again ask me what that word is. I might forget myself and say it. I’m surprised that the world hasn’t already been destroyed by some Genii saying the word. Lots of Genie are even goofier than I am.

MYSELF; Why are you billed as the ‘Weeping Genii?’” Why do you weep?

IFRIT; I’ve always been a very emotional person, and tears come easy to me. And It’s a miming role that I enjoy. I used to be billed as the ‘Weeping Axe-Man’ when I was a gladiator at Rome.

MYSELF; How old are you, Ifrit?

IFRIT; I’m a little over eleven thousand years old. My master, that giant in the sky above us, above this bottle, has fallen asleep over his wine. You had better lam now or he may decide to hold you for ransom. All he has to do is put the cork in the bottle and you’re trapped. He does tricks like that. Up the ladder quickly now! That’s fine. Now the three words!

MYSELF: El-khamis el-goma el-sabt.

Then I was out of the bottle and was my own size again. I found myself rather awkwardly standing on a table in the dining room of the Fairmont Mayo, but I jumped down quietly and left the room as nonchalantly’ as I could. Ifrit and his manager left town quite early the next morning. Ifrit had a wrestling date that night in Muskogee, and then he had them on successive nights in Fort Smith, Little Rock, Texarkana,



Shreveport, Baton Rouge, Port Arthur, and Beaumont. I followed along after them and had further interviews with Ifrit in each of those eight towns. In five of them, he was also visited by friends, either human or Genie, in his estate-in-the-bottle. Ifrit and I became the best friends in the world. He was a person of deep-rooted culture; and he also had a strong and endearing streak of goofiness in him. He may even have been a tall-storyteller. He told me that he had a wife, that she was currently living in a three-liter gin bottle in the Netherlands, that she was carrying a child of his, but that the birth would be not at all soon. The gestation period of Genie, Ifrit said, was a hundred and eight-seven years, and only half of that time had passed with his wife. But another Genii, also of the Ifrit race, told me that my friend Ifrit had been spoofing me, that the gestation period of Genie is only ninety-four years, and that the wife of Ifrit would come to her time within thirty years. Which one to believe?

All things that are worn or carried by a person when he enters a bottle are miniaturized along with him. But it is not really the case of the person or his things being miniaturized at all, but of his being put into a different juxtaposition with all things else in the world so that there is greater variance of apparent size. And for this reason also, the space inside a bottle may sometimes seem much more vast than at other times. And it is generally the case that as a person develops his estate-in-a-bottle he is given more space in which to develop it.

All in all, my friendship with Ifrit was among the most rewarding of my life. When I left the wrestling circuit after eight days with it on the road, I felt a terrible loss.

“But after all, I will be wrestling through this part of the country again in three months’ time,” Ifrit reassured me.

He had heard through their own networks that about a thousand humans in the United States alone had now set up plush estates-in-bottles. This had become the most exclusive of all the in movements. You had to be pretty well in even to have heard of it. But some of those thousand humans, Ifrit gave the opinion, didn’t really have the temperament to handle bottled estates.

This was on the night that Ifrit had defeated the Alligator Man in a bout in Beaumont, and had then fulfilled his vaunt to cut enough out of the Alligator man’s hide to have made for himself a pair of alligator shoes. And Ifrit did cut the pieces out of the hide of his defeated opponent right

there in the ring with a big knife. It was all a hoax, though. That was not the real hide of the Alligator Man. He actually had an ordinary skin like that of yourself or myself, and the alligator hide was only part of his costume.

And the Shoemaker from the “Great Colossal Imperial Alligator Shoe Factory of Tampa Florida” was faking it all when he went for the world’s record (nineteen seconds) for making a pair of alligator shoes right there in the ring. Nevertheless, the Shoemaker seemed to be making the shoes, while drum rolls marked off the seconds, and while the Alligator Man still lay on his belly and writhed, and screamed at the holes that were cut in his hide. And the shoes, size eighteen very wide, did fit Ifrit’s big bare feet perfectly, though really they had been bought previously and only seemed to be made by the Shoemaker in the ring. The loudspeakers announced though that the new world’s record for making a pair of alligator shoes had been set, and that it was eighteen-point-nine-nine-two seconds.

This was all fun. It was part of the folk fakery of professional wrestling. Yet I realized at my heart-wrenching leave-taking that night that there was one thing in professional wrestling that was not a fake. Ifrit the Genii was not a fake. He was the most genuine person I had ever met.

The last words he said to me that night at our parting were, “Why don’t you get a bottle of your own, Henry?” And he added, “Beware of the Pride of Lions in the Sky. That is the only threat to you that I see.”

I smiled. We have very few lions in the skies in my part of the country.

No, there is not any twist to this account, no flashy ending. I will not hoke it up in any way. There is nothing here except the plain observed facts about a patient creature who was born into slavery, a valiant member of a vanishing species that is something of an anomaly in the modern world, a good person, an admirable person, a friendly person. No great deeds attach to him, no exciting actions, and none will be invented for him.

I write only, “He is a good person,” and if that is not exciting, then we will do without excitement this day.

I did, as Ifrit had suggested, get a bottle of my own, an empty gallon bottle that had once held Red Rosa wine. I put it in a fence corner off an alley behind St. Louis Street, about four feet above the concrete, where two of the fence braces joined. No one would notice it there or bother it there. I put just enough water in it to make a large lake, and enough dirt

and pebbles to supply spacious and rolling meadows and sudden mountains. I seeded other things in there with microscopic tokens of themselves. I came and went into my bottle, into my own estate or universe there. I felt like Superman entering that little bottle that contained a great estate and world. And my estate thrived quickly, as I explained at the beginning of this account. In my estate-in-a-bottle I had beautiful friends, a beautiful manor house, a beautiful lake, and beautiful mountains. Listen, did you ever course and race fine horses for mile after mile on the inside of a gallon bottle that had once contained Red Rosa wine? Were your evenings-at-home ever the most cultural in town, the most boozy, the most In-Groupy? Did you ever feel that your bottle was so full that it was running over?

Then disaster struck!. Oh, it struck only five minutes ago. It was so sudden that I am not yet able to appreciate the magnitude of it. My seven best friends, including my fiancée, went up the ladder to the mouth of the bottle just at dawn after the happiest night we had ever experienced together. Then I looked up to watch them going, and I saw the Lions in the Sky, and I froze with fear and horror. And my friends, as they emerged from the throat of the bottle and began to say the three enlarging words, were slapped to their deaths. It was a mother cat there, and she slapped each of my friends (including my fiancée) to one of her seven kittens to catlike bugs.

This, since the striking of that disaster, has been the longest five minutes of my life.

Oh, I see too late that I am one of those humans who lacks the temperament to run an estate-in-a-bottle. And I failed to heed the warning of Ifrit about the dreaded Lions in the Sky. And now I fear that there is no way that I can escape gory death.

Still and all, I was the hottest host in town for a while, and to the Innest Group. And it may have been worth it.

The biggest of the Lions in the Sky, the mother cat, has her paw over the mouth of the bottle, and she is wobbling the bottle. By the flick of her giant tail in the sky I can tell that she is calculating everything minutely.

She will tip the bottle It Will fall four feet to the concrete and it will shatter.

How fast can I say three enlarging words aftenstand free from the shattered bottle? How fast can the mother cat and those seven kittens

pounce on what they believe is a tasty bug?  
I'll race you for it, Lions in the Sky!

## GOLDEN GATE

When you have shot and killed a man you have in some measure clarified your attitude toward him. You have given a definite answer to a definite problem. For better or worse you have acted decisively.

In a way, the next move is up to him.

And it can be a satisfying experience; the more so here, as many would like to have killed him. And now it is done under the ghastly light, just as that old devil's tune comes to a climax and the voices have swelled to an animal roar.

And afterwards an overflowing satisfaction compounded of defiance and daring; and a wonderful clarity born of the roaring excitement. Not peace, but achievement. The shadows prowl in the corners like wolves, and one glows like a lantern.

But Barnaby did not shoot him till Thursday evening. And this was only Monday, and that state of clarity had not yet been attained.

It was clear to Barnaby that Blackie was really a villain. Not everybody knew this. A melodrama villain is only black behind the lights. Off stage he should have a heart of gold. Whether of wrestling match, or afternoon serial, or evening drama or film, or on the little stage here at the Golden Gate Bar, the villain should be — when his role is finished — kind and courteous, thoughtful and big-hearted, a prince of a fellow.

That is no myth. Here it was not entirely true.

"I have always suspected," said Barnaby, "that there is some bad in every villain. I would prove this if only I had proof. Why am I drinking cider?"

"We always give you cider when you have had enough beer."

"It is a dirty trick, and you are a dirty Irish trickster. Tell Jeannie to play 'Fire in the Cockleburs.'"

"There isn't any such song, dear."

"I know there isn't, Margaret, but once I asked her to play a song that wasn't, and she played it."

Barnaby was a confused young man. He was something of a rum-dum as are many of the noble men of the world. And even with a broken nose he was better looking than most. He came to the Golden Gate because he was in love with three wonderful women there.

The Golden Gate Bar is not on the Pacific Ocean. It is on another

ocean, at this point several thousand miles distant. But if the name of fine ocean were known, people would go there, and range up and down that coast until they found this wonderful place. And they would come in every night, and take up room, and stay till closing time.

It is crowded here as it is, The most one can ever get is one wrist on the bar. All the tables are filled early, and no couple ever has one alone for long. The relentless and scantily-dressed waitresses double them up. Then they double them up again as the crowd grows. Soon the girls and ladies have all the seats, and the men stand behind them at the tables. And later, as the drinking and singing continue, some of the men sit on the ladies' laps. They do things like that at the Golden Gate.

Clancy O'Clune, the singing bartender, began this custom. He sang ballads and love songs to the girls. He wandered as he sang, and picked out the plainest and shyest and most spinsterish creature he could find. He would sit on her lap and sing to her; and as soon as her embarrassment had faded a little, she would join in the fun and sing with the crowd.

Group singing was what brought the crowds to the Golden Gate. For people love to sing if they don't have to sing alone. Jeannie was marvelous at the piano, and with her, people would sing all the old ballads: "Tavern in a Town," "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," "When You Were Sixteen," "Hot Time in the Old Town."

The Gate was a family place down on the old pier, and the only drinking spot along the beach where children were admitted. For them was cider in great steins. The motif was Gay Nineties. The were moustaches and derby hats. The waitresses were scanty and seductive, and plumed and pretty in some old dance hall costume fashion. Even the customers liked to dress the part, and came in vintage gowns and old checkered vests from ancient trunks.

"I know the evil of him is largely compounded of soot and grease," said Barnaby who was still thinking of Blackie, the villain. "How do we know that the evil of the devil himself is not so compounded?"

On the floor was sawdust, and the lights were gas lights. The cuspidors were old brass, and stood up in their glory.

"Has Blackie a name, Margaret, like regular people?"

"Of course he has, dear. He is W.K. Willingsforth."

Now that was interesting. The true name of the Devil was sought by

Faust, as to know it gives a power over him. And to learn it so casually was unheard-of luck. And if he had a name, than possibly he had also a habitation as though he were human.

The lamp lighter turned out the lights in the bar-room and fired the eerie gas torches it each and of the stage. For every evening was the melodrama. This was lend and wide, with pistols and boots and whips, and the bull-roarer voice of Blackie. Clancy O'Clune was the hero. Jenny, bustled and bosomed, was the thrilling heroine. And Blackie was the villain, that filthy old snake of a man.

The crowd would howl out "No! No! No!" to his monstrous demands, and hiss and cat-call. And Jeannie at the piano ran a marvelous accompaniment as her sister Jenny fluted her outraged innocence and terror.

This was a Monday night that Barnaby first saw the villain. And an odd passion came on him; for beyond the comic and burlesque he felt a struggle and a terror. The sandy hair raised on his neck, and he knew the villain for what he was.

Barnaby sat with a middle-aged couple and drank beer from a pitcher large beyond all believing.

"We love to come here," said Anne Keppel, "We have so much fun just watching the other people have fun. This is the only place this old bear will ever take me. I love to sing, but I wouldn't dare sing anywhere else. He makes jokes about the ghost of a dead cat coming back, and why does it have to suffer like that."

"The only place I ever sing," said Aurelius Keppel, "is here and in the bath tub. In the tub, I have to keep up a great splashing, or this shrew will beat on the door and announce that the doctor will be here in a minute, and to be brave. It isn't that I haven't a wonderful voice. It isn't that I haven't a wonderful wife. But my wonderful wife doesn't appreciate my wonderful voice."

If one is to hate the villain properly, he should love the heroine. Barnaby loved passionately, but knew only slightly, the heroine, Jenny. A little better he knew, a little more he loved her sister, Jeannie, the pretty piano player. But he knew Margaret, the mother of the two girls, quite well.

Margaret was more beautiful than her daughters. She was the tallest and best liked of those wonderful waitresses. And she was the owner of

the Golden Gate.

And the girls were onto him. "It isn't us, it's mama you like. How does she do it?"

"I'll tell you. She's younger than her daughters. You're a couple of old maids. Young and pretty, but still old maids. You're not in your mother's class."

"Oh, we know it."

But they were no such thing. They were as exciting and heady a pair as were ever met. Jenny, the frail heroine, might toss a man over her shoulder like a sack and spin away with him. And there was never any telling what Jeannie would do.

The melodrama was over, and the little stage was dark. And it was then that Barnaby knew that he must kill the villain.

Clancy O'Clune, still in his hero's habiliments, picked a slightly gray and quietly amused pretty lady. He sat on her lap and sang to her softly a goodnight lullaby. Afterwards, Jeannie brought the piano to a great volume, and everybody sang "We Won't Go Home Till Morning."

But they all went home at midnight when the Golden Gate closed.

And when Barnaby was home, he took out a little six-shot and fondled it as though it were a jewel.

2

Now it was Tuesday, the second day of the involvement. Barnaby was sitting in the company of four sophomores from City College. It is known by all, though not admitted by all, that sophomores are at the same time the most ingenuous, ingenious, and disingenuous people in the world. They are a wonder and a confrontation. Their hearts are ripe and their minds are on fire, and the door of the whole cosmos is open to them. Now, at the end of their second spring, they are imbued with clarity and charm.

"A survey reveals that eighty percent of the people believe in Heaven but only twenty percent in Hell," said Veronica. "That is like believing in up but not down, in a disc of only one side, a pole with a top but no bottom, Making Love to Alice Bly, in light but not in darkness."

That one line in the middle was not part of the argument. It was a line in the ballad that the crowd was singing, and Veronica sang it with them. And yet it too was part of the argument, for Miss Bly, who looked like an angel, had roots that went down to Hell.



It was odd that they would be talking of things like that. And only Barnaby knew the reason: that Blackie was so much a Devil that they were reminded of his homeland.

“If it weren’t for the evil in it the world would be a fine place,” said Simon. “But it is only the Evil who do not believe in evil, and only the Hellish who do not believe in Hell. There’s Seven Men Going to the Graveyard.”

“And Only Six are Coming Back,” sang Hazel. Then she said, “It is there like a cold wind, and curls in the corner like a dog. A whole room full of people can turn evil in a minute. The world grinds and shudders. It can come like a bolt and stand in the middle of you.”

It did come like a bolt and stand in the middle of them, but perhaps only Barnaby knew what it was and shivered for it. And yet the rest shivered as with sudden cold. For the Villain had appeared costumed in his villainy, and the melodrama began.

Once more the short red hair rose on the nape of Barnaby, and the odd passion came over him. He breathed heavily, as did others in the room. There was a terror in the comic, and excitement danced like lightning over the burlesque stage.

And when the crowd howled “No! No! No!” in simulated fury, it was not entirely simulated. And there were some who crowed “Yes! Yes!” wickedly against the crowd; and one of these was Hazel, bright-eyed and panting, as she felt the evil, like a dog in the corner, rise within her.

So it thrashed to a climax. Did not Jeannie know that the accompaniment she played on the piano was diabolic? For the temptations of the dark villain were manifold. But for a word of his, the crippled brother of the heroine would go to prison; and he withheld the word. But for his testimony, the mine of the heroine’s father would pass into the domain of the Fast Buck Mining Company, and he would not give the testimony. There was even evidence, clear to the more perspicacious, that he was himself the Fast Buck Mining Company. But for him, the dastardly he about the heroine’s mother would spread and spread; and perhaps he would be the one to spread it. There would be no bread in the cupboard, nor coal in the scuttle, nor milk for the small children. And against all this only the frail virtue of the thrilling heroine.

“She ought to go with him,” said the girl at the next table. “He only wants her for the weekend. I’d go with him. Yes! Yes!” cried the girl at the

next table.

And then Barnaby knew for sure that the old dark villain had to die.

Now the melodrama was over and the lamp lighter lit the lights again. The sods rose in a hundred-headed fountain; everybody had a dozen more beers and sang the ballads of Jeannie. Clancy O'Clune put on his sheriffs badge that was eighteen inches across, and there was law and order, though a great deal of noise, in the Golden Gate Bar.

And when the midnight tide pounded under the pier, Clancy came and sat on the silken knees of a little houri named Maybelline, and sang to her "Good Night Little Sweetheart."

And after everybody sang "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," they all went home. Except those who went to the Buccaneer, and the Alamo, and the Town House, and places like that.

3

Wednesday morning Barnaby had a breakfast date with Jenny. It may not have been made clear that Jenny was really beautiful. Just how beautiful, it is impossible to say. Not, perhaps, as beautiful as her sister Jeannie. Not, certainly, as beautiful as her mother, Margaret. But nevertheless breath-taking, fantastic, clear out of the world.

But she asked the oddest questions.

"Why don't you work? You're not working today. You didn't work yesterday. I don't think you even worked Monday."

"Listen," said Barnaby. "You can believe it or not, but before that I worked for four weeks straight. Naturally I'm entitled to a vacation. How could I work this week when I've met you wonderful people and have you to think about? If it wouldn't make you conceited, I'd tell you how wonderful you really are."

"No. It won't make me conceited. Please tell me. I know, of course, but I like to have people tell me."

"You are just a dream. You are that little heroine all the time. All of you are wonderful except that villain. I would like to strangle him with my hands."

"Why, he's the most wonderful of us all, He's a real flesh-crawler. I know what's the matter. You're jealous because it's really mama you're in love with. I guess all villains are really marvelous."

"I know a devil when I see one. I'll bring a gun some night and kill him."

“He says sometimes people do. Not kill him, but shoot at him. Then he knows he’s getting across. But it’d be terrible if something happened to him.”

“It would be grand.”

“Don’t talk like that, I have to go. I’m glad you asked me, but I’m mad that you asked Jeannie first. If I’m a dream, why did you ask her first? Now I have to leave because I’m always so busy. Wait till the waitress goes by, and then kiss me. Be in tonight and see how pretty I look.”

Now it was Wednesday night, the third of the epic. Barnaby was at a table with three seamen. These were not unknown. Long John in particular was known all over town. He was not merely lantern-jawed, he was jawed like an eighteenth-century ship’s lantern, copper bound and brass bottomed, and the nose on him as livid and red as an old beacon at night. His clothing was beyond description, and the hat on his head older than any man now living in the world. And most know Benny Bigby and Limey Lynd, the other two. To know them, however, was not to like them. Benny had a muzzle like a fox and was always looking over his shoulder. Limey was a cockney dude. They were loud and obscene. If they hadn’t been friends of Barnaby, he wouldn’t have liked them either.

Already, through the early crowd there was running a tide of resentment toward the seamen; and this only for their insistence that all the songs that night should be sea songs. Now there is nothing wrong with “As I was A-walking Down Paradise Street — With a Ho Ho Blow The Man Down,” but it has seventeen choruses, and when it is sung seventeen times, that makes either two hundred and eighty-nine or two hundred and ninety-nine. That is too much.

And when another ballad slipped in sideways:

“I only ask you, lack, to do your duty, that is all; You know you promised that we should be wed,”

they sit in towering silence and would not sing.

“It isn’t as though they were high-sea seamen,” Blackie, the villain, said to Clancy O’Clune. “One of them works on a garbage scow, and one on a pile-driving barge, and one on a ferry boat.”

But Barnaby was loyal to his friends, and he considered only the evil source of the remark. So he also howled for sea songs.

Now the crowd came like snow and filled the room.

“I have been in every Hell Hole of the world,” said Long John.

“Zanzibar, Devil’s Island, Port Royal (that was before the earthquake), Oklahoma City, Cote der Pirates, Newport News, Mobile, Alabama; but I have never seen a more evil looking man. Who is he?”

Barnaby was pleased. He had found a friend. Someone else who hated Blackie. “That is Blackie, the Villain.”

“Ah, Le Noire, I should have known. I heard of him once in Marseille.”

And yet that was hardly possible, for neither of them had ever been there.

The thing about Blackie, is that he was very easy to be afraid of. He had arms like a python. And if one cannot conceive of a python with arms, no more can he of Blackie. Barnaby was a handy young man. Though he fought less than he once did, yet he always won more fights than he lost. He measured Blackie with his gray eyes, and he knew that he was afraid of him.

“I wonder how it will be when he is dead,” said Barnaby. “When the soul leaves the body, they speak of the Wings of the Dove. With him it will be the pinions of the vulture.”

The little houri named Maybelline came over and made herself acquainted with Barnaby, and he was entranced with her. And however it happened, she was soon sitting on his knee, and they were drinking beer from the same mug.

It wasn’t as though he weren’t still in love with Jeannie, who now smiled and frowned at him together from her piano.

It wasn’t as though he wasn’t still in love with Margaret who now wagged a finger at him from across the room. But an houri is different from other girls, and when you are entranced, what can you do?

Everybody sang:

“In a cottage down in Sussex Live her parents old and lame, And they drink the wine she sends them, But they never speak her name.”

And they sang:

“Shoot me like an Irish soldier, Do not hang me like a dog.”

Everybody sang together the music of Jeannie, and the only lights in the place were those old gas lights. Something went out of the world with them. These new lights, they have no smell to them, they have no flicker or real glow. You can’t reach up and light a cigar or dramatically burn a letter. It’s almost as though they weren’t alive.

And after a while, Jeannie began to play devil’s music, and Evil

uncoiled like a snake and slid into the room. The lights in the world went out, and the torches were lit in Hell; and the melodrama began on the little stage. The world shuddered on its axis, and the villain was prince of the world. Once more the odd passion came on Barnaby. An animal surge went through the crowd as the noble hero and the trilling heroine and the dark villain acted out the oldest epic in the world.

“No! No! No!” But tonight virtue would not triumph. The more he was hissed, the more powerful the villain became. For he also had his supporters, and now they rose like a ground swell. Virtue was howled down in a crescendo of devil’s music played by Jeannie at the piano.

“O.K.” said Jenny, the heroine, “let’s go and get it over.” So Jenny went with the evil villain, and everybody laughed as the lights were lit again with a taper.

Now they all had a dozen more beers and sang:

“Just break the news to Mother, She knows how dear I love her, And tell her not to wait for me, For I’m not coming home.”

And the words had a double meaning for Barnaby.

They sang:

“The cook she was a kind old soul. She had a ragged dress. We hoisted her upon a pole As a signal of distress.”

And this seemed inexpressibly sad to Barnaby, and not even the hour on his knees could cheer him up.

For over in the corner was Jenny, and she was sitting with Blackie, the villain, in a condition of extreme friendliness; and for all he knew they were drinking their beer from the same pitcher.

Then, as the night ran on, Clancy O’Clune picked out an eleven year old girl who was drinking cider with her father, who was a barber, and he came and sat on her lap and sang to her “Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms” for a goodnight song.

Afterwards everybody sang “We Won’t Go Home Till Morning.” And they all went home at midnight.

4

Thursday morning Barnaby had a breakfast date with Jeannie, the outrageously beautiful piano player.

“Did Jenny turn you down? Why did you ask me first today?”

“I always ask you first.”

“Jebny says you’re mad at her because she’s friendly with Blackie.

But he's so nice. Don't you know that? He's one of the nicest men we ever met."

"He is a devil. He makes my flesh crawl."

"He is supposed to. But only on the stage, He's a consummate actor. I think that's the word that mama says he is. And mama says for us to keep an eye on you because you're acting so peculiar. We tell her you only act peculiar over her. Don't you think we'd make nice daughters-in-law?"

"You would be nice anything, Jennie."

"And don't you wish you were a sultan and could have us all at once?"

"Yes I do. I never thought of it, but that's just what I wish."

"And the houri too?"

"How did you know she was an houri? I thought I was the only one who knew."

"I'm never sure you're serious. I do have to go, dear. Isn't it too bad that everyone always has to go all the time? You eat the rest of my jelly and egg. Kiss me. Good bye."

And it was morning and evening, the fourth day.

And in the evening Barnaby sat with a table full of refinery workers. He had brought with him tonight his little six shot loaded. And five were blanks and one was not.

The refinery workers were named Croesus Kahlmeyer, Midas Morressey, and Money-Bags Muldoon. These are the names that the waitresses gave to them, for refinery workers are the biggest tippers in the world. They tip livishly. The reason they call do this is that all refinery workers get a hundred hours a week overtime, and the money they make is fantastic.

Gaiety Garrett was waiting their table. The boys all called her Gaiety Unrestrained. And in a larger sense gaiety unrestrained reigned through the whole of the Golden Gate.

Now the surf pounded loudly under the pier. It always seemed noisiest when the melodrama was about to start. For after the hours had passed, the lamp lighter turned out the lights in the barroom and flared the torches on the stage. The smell of them came over the room like a weird fog.

Then Barnaby took the little six-shot from his pocket and fondled it. For the reign of the prince of evil was about to be ended in the world.

And when the melodrama was at its loudest, and the pistols barked,

and the crowd roared like an animal, Barnaby raised his six-shot trembling.

And fired it six times.

It is such a little thing to kill a man and brings so much satisfaction, you wonder everybody does not do it. It is like walking through green meadows after an oppressing darkness.

Barnaby relaxed and the short hairs subsided on his nape; for the passion had left him. Peace came down on him like white snow.

“I have killed the villain,” he slid. And he had. The pinions of the vulture had sounded and the soul of the villain had gone.

But the act was for himself alone. Only he and the victim knew that it had happened.

For Blackie did not act as though he were killed. He strutted through the drama to its close while the crowd howled and everyone was happy.

Yet there was no doubt that the villain was dead, for a great clarity had descended on Barnaby. And Blackie was now more like an odd old friend who needed a shave, and no more a python or a devil.

Margaret came to the table and she was white faced.

“Don’t you ever do a thing like that again. Give me that. How could you do that to him? We all love you and thought you loved us.”

And she looked at him queerly. He liked the way she looked at him: a sort of wild worry beneath the kindness.

Everybody drank an ocean of beer and sang thousands upon thousands of songs. And when it was late, Clancy O’Clune went over to Gladys, who wore glasses, and sat on her lap and sang “Just a Song at Twilight” for a goodnight song.

And as always they sang “We Won’t Go Home Till Morning”. And as always they went home at midnight.

5

Friday morning Barnaby went to work; but there was only a half day’s work for him. It often happens that a boy will find only a half day’s work after he has laid off for a week and needs it.

And in the afternoon he went to the Golden Gate, which was closed in the daytime. He went in the back where deliveries were made.

The sour ghost of last night’s beer permeated the place. And there was another ghost there, loud and wailing.

It was a terrible noise, a discordant clanging and chording that was

the saddest thing he had ever heard: the woeful wailing of a soul that has been in purgatory a long century, and has just been told that it is not purgatory it is in. It was a hopeless crash filled with a deep abiding sorrow that had once been hope.

Blackie was playing the piano, and there was torture in his eyes. Yet he talked happily.

“Hello, Barnaby. I love the instrument. I play it every chance I get. Yet I am told that I do not play well. Do I play well, Barnaby?”

“No, no, you play quite badly.”

Blackie, this old python who needed a shave, seemed discouraged.

“I was afraid you would think so. Yet to myself it is beautiful. Do you think it sounds beautiful to anyone?”

“No. I don’t think it would sound beautiful to anyone in the world, Blackie.”

“I wish it weren’t so.”

“I shot at you last night, Blackie.”

“I know it. Six shots. I knew you would.”

“One of them was not a blank.”

“The third. I know it would be the third. I dug it out of the plaster this morning.”

“Does anyone else know?”

“No. How would anyone else know? I am going away, Barnaby.”

“Where?”

“Kate’s Klondike Bar. They need a villain there. Here they are changing the format. They will call this the Speakeasy. It will be a gin mill with flapper waitresses like John Held Jr. pictures. They will have a lost generation motif and sing lost twenties songs. Clancy is practicing ‘Star Dust’ all the time. I could stay on as a gangster, but I am better as an old time villain. The gay days are about over. The Twenties will be the new era of nostalgia.”

“I will not like that.”

He went to find Margaret where she was counting her money in a little room.

“Blackie says you are going to change this to a Sad Twenties place.”

“Yes, dear, the Twenties will be all the rage now.”

“I don’t remember them like I do the older times. I wasn’t even born yet, in the twenties. Do you remember them, Margaret?”



“Of course I do. It’ll be sweet to have them back. We have some wonderful ideas. The girls play old scratchy records all day long to learn them.”

“Will you still have the melodrama?”

“Well, no. But we’ll leave skits. Well, not skits really; we’ll have ukelele players and things like that. You’ll like it.”

“There’s only one thing bothers me.”

“What, dear?”

“In the Twenties, how did they know who was the villain?”

“I don’t know, dear. Here are the men with the scenery. I have to show them where to put it.”

But that Friday night it wasn’t the same. The girls were all dressed in potato sacks with the belts only three inches from the bottom. Their stockings were rolled and their knees were rouged; and on their heads were sheath-like helmets that made them look like interplanetary creatures with the ears sheared off them. Jenny and Jeannie looked like two peeled onions with not enough hair on their heads to cover them. Oh, that those breath-taking creatures should come to this!

They sang “Yes Sir, she’s my baby.” They sang “Oh you have no idea.” They sang:

“You play the Uke, You’re from Dubuque, I go for that.”

The Speakeasy spoke, but Barnaby could not hear its message. To him it was dismal and deep. And then the long evening was over and the gin glasses were empty.

Clancy O’Clune was singing a good night song to a boney flapper.

“Picture me Upon your knee, And tea for two, And two for tea.”

But he didn’t sit on her lap. All at once none of the ladies were built like that anymore.

Barnaby went to Blackie’s room, Blackie was packing.

“What town is Kate’s Klondike Bar in?”

Blackie told him the town. But it shall be told to no one else. If it were known, people would go there, and come in every night, and take up room; and it’s going to be crowded enough there as it is.

“That isn’t very far,” said Barnaby. “That’s only a couple of hundred miles. I’ll go there and get a job. Then at night I can come in and listen to them sing, and watch the melodrama.”

## THIS BODING ITCH

### 1

*The Palmer Itch, the Palmer Itch  
Assuaged with oil and honey,  
It means that we will all be rich  
In everything but money.*

—C.S. Wynward Lewis

On all channels, the comedians on the early evening (6:05-6:10) comedy spot had jokes about itching palms. Yes, and they were all jokes about the left palm being itchier than the right palm.

“I didn’t know that anybody except me had itching palms today,” one hundred million wives in just one country said when they heard the comic.

“I didn’t know that anybody except me had itching palms today,” one hundred million husbands gave the echo. “And I sure didn’t know that anybody except me had their left palm itcllier than their right one.”

And six minutes later, it was on all the early (6:16-6:21) news spots.

“If only they don’t call it the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome,’” a young lady named Vera Vanguard said. “I can stand any thing except that.”

“I suppose that we may as well call it the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome,’” the spot news commentator said. “The phenomenon is with us and it may well be with us for the foreseeable future, possibly until the 7:01 news spot. Our foreign contacts assilre us that it is now world-wide. Oh, there is professor Arpad Arutinov. Professor, can you give us an opinion on the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome?’”

“See page 982, paragraph 2,” Arutinov said. He was an imposing man except for his shocking weasel-like face.

“Page 982, paragraph 2 of what, sir?” the spot news commentator asked.

“Of the book,” Arpad Arutinov said. “And don’t ask what book. There is only one.” The Professor disappeared from the screen. He always seemed to be just passing through, and yet he was always seen briefly in very many places, dozens every night, wherever the TV lights were shining.

“I wonder what book he means,” the commentator said. He looked at his next note. “So far, the wave of suicides attributed to the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome’ has been quite light. The Syndrome is driving people bugs, but it is not driving very many of them over the buggy edge yet. The death rate is sure to pick up as the evening unrolls, if the itchiness holds.”

The commentator didn’t know what book the Professor meant, but at least two of his listeners did know.

“Hand me the book, Fritz,” Vera Vanguard said, “and then look to your Happy Ox Hodgepodge. I think it’s burning.”

“There is no way my Happy Ox Hodgepodge can burn,” Fritz said. “The hotter the fire, the more juice will bubble up in it.” And Fritz Der Grosse handed the book to Vera and she turned to page 982 paragraph 2 and read:

“The Mutational-Advances in the human species have been orderly and well-spaced. And each has been quite clearly announced, though only at the very moment of its happening. The coining of color vision, the coming of speech, the coming of consciousness (the latter two were probably simultaneous comings) have all been announced by rampant pruritus. The ancient trepanning of skulls which so puzzled archeologists and anthropologists was directed at getting into the brain to scratch the announcing pruritus, the Boding Itch.

“Humans as they are now constituted are only about two steps away from perfection. Since the mutational-advances have been orderly and well-spaced, let us consider which advances are next in order. And let us consider when the spacing will be fulfilled. My own figures indicate that the spacing is fulfilled almost exactly now and that it is time for a new appearance (which I believe will be a double ippearance).

“All that humans now need for their completion are a handy road map to show them where they’re going, and a correlating eye to show them where they are right now. They will get these two benefits quite soon, and there will be a spill-over of them to other intelligent species.

“The spill-over to other intelligent species is a sort of insurance. If mankind stumbles and falls back at this step, or at any other step, things will not have to begin quite at the beginning again. The other intelligent species will have a good start on things, a better-than-nothing start.

“When the rampant and universal itching appears, know you that the illuminating summer of the intellect is nigh.”

“Well, that’s surely plain enough,” Fritz said. He took the book from Vera and put it back on the shelf. The name of the book was *The Back Door of History* and it was written by that weasel-faced Doctor Arpad Arutinov.

Vera and Fritz went into the kitchen to eat the Happy Ox Hodgepodge, one of the Great Dishes of the Western World.

“Yes, that’s surely plain enough,” Vera agreed as she tied the bib under her chin (Happy Ox is sloppy), “but there’s many a slip on those muddy syllogistic roads. When will WHEW get into the act? And how can WHEW be balked from spoiling the whole show?”

WHEW was ‘Worldwide Health Enforcement Wardens.’ This multinational agency under its motto ‘Good health and good attitude compulsory for everyone!’ could act on a world-wide scale within short minutes to obliterate any new ailment or unease. Sometimes it acted too rapidly, but it was never guilty of not acting. There was no way that it could neglect something like the new itch.

“What worries me most is WHEW’s secondary motto ‘Out by the roots! Leave not a trace,’” Fritz said. “I believe that it will be a very delicate and detailed tracery, and I don’t want my own version of it to be obliterated without a trace. I believe that the tracery will consist of a ‘world line’ as well as a ‘personal line,’ and that those of us who are the natural leaders must combine the two of them in our leadership. Perhaps some of us could hide?”

“Hide from WHEW? Oh, that’s funny. Nobody can hide from WHEW, Fritz.”

“Monkeys and apes world-wide are also exhibiting the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome,’” a commentator’s voice on the 6:41 news spot was saying. “And dolphins are showing a strange and unlocalized unease which is somewhat similar to the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome.’ Let me emphasize though that the dolphins are not actually suffering from an itching of the palms of their hands. They haven’t any hands or palms thereof.

“But WHEW is on the job. Already they have treated and cured ten million persons and they will be treating about ten million persons a minute until everybody on Earth is cured. WHEW is using the new (well, it’s about six minutes old now) Deep-Bite Acid Treatment. There have been early complaints of the treatment leaving holes clear through the palms of the hands, but this has now been adjusted for. The Deep-Bite

Treatment was biting a little bit too deep for a short while there. But the mysterious itch will soon be no more than a memory.”

“Maybe we could get good depth photographs of the — ah — road maps of the future before they are obliterated,” Fritz Der Grosse hazarded to Vera.

“I’m afraid not,” she snuffed that one out. “The maps are not clarified yet, on me or on you, and I don’t believe that they will be clarified until the itch has run its course.”

“If extremes come to the extreme, we could —” Fritz hesitated.

“What, funny man, what?” Vera asked him.

“Lop them off,” Fritz Der Grosse said in a pale voice.

Vera Vanguard read scraps from another book, while they assessed a very direful situation.

“There are seven major mounts on the palm of the hand: the Mounts of Jupiter, Saturn, Apollo, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and the Moon.

“There are seven major nodes on the palm of the palm: the Nodes of Solomon or Judgement, of Everlastingness or Transcendence, of Virtue, of Eloquence, of Power, of Agape or Enabling Love, and of Futurity.

“There are six minor lines on the palm of the hand: the Life Line, the Saturn Line, the Head Line, the Heart Line, the Mars Line, and the Girdle of Venus.

“Thus it is seen that there are seven mounts and seven nodes, but only six major lines. This does not mean that we have lost one of the lines of the palm of our hand. It means that we haven’t arrived at it yet. Indeed there is folk memory of the time when there were only four major lines in our palms.

“The seventh line, when it appears, will be the line of the Future, and it will be the chart of things to come. It will erupt out of the Node of Futurity which is located in the Mount of the Moon, and it will move across the palm to the Ring of Saturn which is at the base of the index finger.

“It is the custom to end books on Palmistry with the question, ‘What does the future hold?’ The answer is that the future for us holds the Vision of the Future Limned out plainly in the palms of our hands, and it holds a new Illumination to see that Future by.”

The book that Vera Vanguard had read this from was Palmistry for Plain People, by Moses Mantes.

About thirty of the people who considered themselves as natural leaders in that town had gathered in the rooms of Fritz Der Grosse.

“If we are able to effect telekinesis it all, and I believe that we are, then we should surely be able to control and influence our detached parts,” George Fronrunner said. “We are already on the verge of a breakthrough in this field. We’ll let this impasse push us right into this breakthrough.”

Then the commentator on the 7:01 news spot was talking:

“For more than eight minutes now WHEW has been developing new breed of dog that will go direct to severed members, and utterly destroy them. Here is a direct quote from the Plenipotentiary of WHEW: ‘Don’t hack them off, folks. They aren’t that itchy. And if you have any left-handed (hey, that’s a pun) ideas about this, well, forget them!’ People out there, WHEW means what it says.”

“Let’s cut our losses in half,” Fritz said to that circle of his friends. “Oh, we’ll each just lop the left one off and try to conceal it in a good place, though the dogs do complicate that. The left palm is supposed to be much the more informative one, you know.”

*The eyes we have, the eyes we have,  
And soon we'll have another!  
Or else a leopard epitaph.  
Oh how they slink and slutlier!*

—C.S. Leeward Lewis

Vera Vanguard was giggling. Her handless left hand was packed in dry ice to stop its bleeding, and she looked dismal and disheveled. None the less, she was giggling.

“I thought it would stop half the itching, at least,” she snickered, “and it did for a moment. But now I have a now itch, right on the top of my head. And I’ve only one hand to scratch that with, and no other hand at all for scratching my itching hand.”

“Yes, I have an itching right on the top of my head too,” several of them said. “It’s the second stage of the rocket, as it were.”

“The ‘Book’ said that the new appearance would probably be a double appearance,” Fritz reminded them. “Well, what is going to develop on the tops of our heads?”

The severed left hands of the thirty persons were romping around on the talbes and floor, and climbing up the draperies. They wre under pretty good telekinetic control by their owners, though several of the hands seemd to have minds and lives of their own. Each of these hands bore an dmerging map of the future, and they must be kept safe from the effecting cures of the WHEW.

Four of the hands, working together, raised one of the windows two inches and crawled out under it to the stone ledge outside. Other left hands opened the other two windows of the room, and then all the hands were outside on the ledges. The people closed and locked the windows then and pulled the drapes over them. Would the dogs developed by WHEW be able to find and destroy the hands when the hands were outside on stone ledges that were thirty stories high?

“The dolphins, worlwide, are spending a lot of time contemplating their navels,” the commenator on the 7:31 news spot was speaking. “They are contemplating their navels and grinning those wide dolphin grins. And the dolphis are, especially within the last four minutes, becoming

arrogant and uncooperative in certain experiments that people have been conducting on them. What does it all mean?”

“It means that now the dolphins can read the future and the humans can’t,” said a one-handed young lade named Clair O’Hare. It’s been suspected that dolphns had the equivalent of our palmistry all along, but we never knew how it was recorded. So that’s wehre they have it, in the navel. Never mind, in three or four minutes we’ll be able to read the future too.”

“WHEW has nearly completed its world-wide work,” the commentator was saying. “The Deep-Bite Acid Treatment has already been applied to mroe than ninety-nine percent of the people in the world and the damnable itching has been eaten out to its roots. After being healed, all persons will have slick and unlined palms. The WHEW crews are now mopping up the remaining one-third of one percent of the people in the world, those who are marked for special handling, those idenfied by the sensors as being somehow uncooperative.

“There’s an interesting side-light to this. Most people, as soon as the itching in their palms is cured, complain of an itshing in the top of their heard. ‘I think my head has been itching for quite a while,’ some of them say, ‘but I didn’t notice it so much because the itching in my hands was worse.’ We may, have a follow- up on the ‘Itchy Pate Syndrome’ on the 7:46 news spot.”

A bunch of WHEW crewmen burst in on the grup in the rooms of Fritz Der Gross. “You people are ticketed for special handling,” the leader said, “but I don’t know why. Oh, maybe that’s it! Eustace, bring the specially trained dogs. Thirty of you folks here, and each of you has his left hand freshly lopped off. How are we going to treat hands that aren’t here? How did this happen?”

“Thirty separate grotesque accidents,” Fritz said. “I know it’s an outrageous coincidence, but it’s no more than that.”

The Whew crewmen gave the right hands of each of the group the Deep-Bite Acid Treatment and burned out their LInes of the Future just when they were in the final stages of being born. Never mind, the lines of the left palm are always clearer than those of the right.

Then the crewman, Eustace, came in with nine fierce, newly-trained dogs. The dogs threw themselves against the windows of the room, broke them out, and tumbled through.



“After than!” the chief of the WHEW crew cried; and all of those crewmen followed the dogs through the windows and into a thirty-story fall to shattering death. The crewmen on ‘special handling; jobs are indeed specialist, but their specializations have crowded out their common sense.

The phone rang. Fritz answered it. And a tapping noise came from it.

“That’s mini-Morse Code,” said a one-handed man named Horace Rand. “I’m pretty sure that I can understand it. I’m pretty sure that I’m sending it, in a way, through my own detached and observing left hand. I’ve sent a lot of mini-Morse by that hand. Yes, here is the message: ‘All clear here. We’re on the window ledges three floors above you. We sure did snooker those dogs and fellows, didn’t we? Did you ever see dogs trying to follow a trail straight up into the air when they’re falling straight down? They can’t get any traction. Is it all clear down there? Can we come back down?’”

“Wandering hands, come back to us,” Horace tapped in mini-Morse. And within three minutes all the severed hands had returned to their owners and were frolicking over them like so many pet squirrels.

“Our hands really could be handier for us now than they were before,” Claire said. “This is neat. And the Line of the Future in my separated hand here has become quite clear and wonderfully detailed. I can’t quite interpret it yet, but I feel that the ability and illumination for that is on the way to me.”

They all knew what was happening, of course, and how that ability and illumination was coming to them. They knew that at the fontanel of the head there was a ‘third-eye’ that saw by a sense other than regular sight, the third eye that had been asleep in all of us for the last few short thousands of years, the third eye that should open to new unifying and illuminating vision any time now.

“Zoo monkeys and apes have become very arch and knowing in the last few moments,” the commentator on the 8:01 news spot was saying. “They look at the palms of their left hands and they laugh. They scratch their heads (they seem to have the new pate itch the same as humans do), but they scratch their heads with a sort of delight. They seem to know something that we don’t.”

The thirty persons in Fritz Der Grosse’s rooms (natural leaders, every one of them) looked at the palms of their left hands (“Oh, roll over, now

flatten out a bit, perfect, perfect!”) and laughed with new joy. They scratched the tops of their heads (with their right hands only), and they scratched with a sort of delight. They were beginning to know things that nobody had ever known before.

And they ate more Happy Ox Hodgepodge. It’s great brain-food, it’s great disposition-and-attitude food, and it’s the best ‘third-eye’ food in the world.

“The dolphins still contemplate their navels,” the commentator was saying, “and now they seem to ripple the skin of their heads and whistle and giggle a lot.”

“The dolphins already have the blow-holes at the proper place,” a one-handed man named Cyril H. Digby said. “They are natural ‘third-eye’ creatures. The third eye as shown in old alchemical drawings has always looked at least as much like a dolphin’s eye as a human’s eye to me.”

“But WHEW is on the job,” the spot commentator was continuing. “The Deep-Bite Acid Treatment developed earlier in the evening for the obliteration of the ‘Itchy Palm Syndrome’ has been adapted and deepened for the obliteration of the ‘Itchy Pate Syndrome.’ The secondary motto of WHEW the Worldwide Health Enforcement Wardens is still ‘Out by the Roots. Leave not a Trace.’ WHEW is now making twenty million cures per minute Worldwide of the ‘Itchy Pate Syndrome.’”

“Nipped in the bud,” Vera Vanguard said, “or rather ‘nipped in the bloom,’ for we have already begun to bloom with our glorious new mutational-advance. We have the handy road maps to show us where we’re going, to show us the future; and we begin to have the correlating inner-outer eye to show us where we really are now. It sees by a sense other than regular sight, but it sees totally. But WHEW is on the strike again. What will we do?”

“When a process has worked well once —” Fritz Der Grosse began.

“Then take a long cool look at it before you try it again,” Horace Rand offered.

“We may not have time enough to take a long cool look,” very said apprehensively.

“I say ‘Lop them off!’,” Fritz cried.

“Is it our heads you are talking about, man?” Cyril H. Digby asked. “Yes, our heads,” Fritz maintained it, “our wonderful heads with so much new illumination churning around in them. Oh, I feel myself getting

smarter by the minute.”

“I’m not sure that your latest proposal reflects that, man,” Cyril said.

And now the 8:11 spot news commentator wis talking: “Within the last eight minutes WHEW has developed a new breed of hunting leopards that will savagely and instinctively zero in on severed human heads and find them and devour them. Don’t look for easy outs, folks. WHEW will cure your pate itch in WHEW’s own way.”

“That just about does us in,” Claire O’Hare railed. “The ledges outside the windows are too narrow for our heads. They’d roll off. And even if they didn’t roll off, they wouldn’t be able to climb up the walls to the higher stories. The leopared would have them right where they were.”

“It’s going to be a race, folks, and I always loved a race,” Vera crowed with avid pleasure. “I feel myself getting smarter by the second, and I’m sure the rest of you are lighting up too. If only a WHEW crew doesn’t got here for three or four minutes we’ll be so smart that we can outwit them a dozen different ways.”

But a WHEW crew burst into the rooms in that very instant.

“Delay them just half a minute, group,” Vera Vanguard begged her associates in a husky voice. “Oh, I’m getting so smart so fast that I know I’ll think of something in half a minute.”

But the WHEW crewmen were already inflicting the Deep-Bite Acid Treatment cures on the heads of group people, eating those third eyes clown to their roots before they were fully awake.

“No, no, our heads don’t itch at all,” Horace Rand protested.

“The Pruritus-meters are running and they say that your heads do itch,” the chief of the WHEW crew said. “Great leaping leopards, that’s what the joyful leaping marks on my Line of the Future are,” Fritz cried. “Oh great leaping leopards!”

And the leaping leopards were in the room.

“Won’t you WHEW gentlemen all have some Happy Ox Hodgepodge?” Vera asked.

“I will,” the chief said, and he began to fill a big platter with it. “And my men will have some of it just as soon as they finish treating you people, just as soon as they are certain that they have you cured and no mistake about it.”

“A report from India says that the elephants are looking into the ends of their trunks and cooing with delight,” the commentator on the 8:16

news spot was saying. “And they are scratching the tops of their heads on the holes of trees with obvious pleasure.”

“I suppose that the spill-over to the other intelligent species is a good thing,” Fritz Der Grosse said, “but it is not enough. We need us too.”

A one-handed man named Buford Cracksworthy, in a moment of panic, had lopped off his own head.

“Here, here, here,” the chief of the WHEW crew cried. “That isn’t allowed at all.”

“Oh boy oh boy oh boy!” the severed head moaned in severe unease. The slumped-over body of Gracksworthy wasn’t in control of its head, and the head wasn’t in very good control of itself. That wasn’t a successful way of saving the third eye.

One of the leaping leopards came, smashed the head, and then chewed it iipind swallowed it. It sounded as if the beast was chewing a head of cabbage.

“What a race, right down to the wire,” Vera Vanguard chortled. “I’m getting so smart I’m about to bust. Oh, is it my turn now? Have you already blinded the third eyes, that is cured all the others? Hand, just let me see that line once more by my new illumination. Oh, I understand it. There is a delay, and there is a great burgeoning in the group futurity line then, an absolute incandescence. But my personal future line, why is it blurred?

“I’ll think of something, I’ll think of something fast. Ouch! Say, that deep-bite acid does have a bite to it! Oh, its darker in here than it was. And I forget what I was trying to do.”

## TONGUES OF THE MATAGORDA

“I will tell you one of my early adventures,” said Esteban of Azamor, “the adventure that, more than any other, made me what I am today. It is an account that should be cut in crystal for the magnificence of it, but I can do no more than tell it in crystalline words.”

“Make it that they are Quevenes words then,” said a surly Quevenes Indian called Glaukos. “You know what will happen if you continue to use Spanish words.”

“Oh certainly, you will cut another piece out of my tongue. But I’ve saved you the trouble. Here is a piece of my tongue that I cut off already. So if in my account I do use a Spanish word now and then, it is already paid for.”

“This is no piece of your tongue,” Gliukos said. “It is a piece of moon-crab meat. But I am starving so I will eat it.” The Quevenes did not like their slaves to talk in words they did not understand; and to compel them to speak Quevenes they had indeed cut notches and slivers from the tongues of Esteban and also his companions in slavery, Captain Dorantes and Captain Castillo.

“It was in the year of Restored Salvation 1481 and I was the son of the Emperor Maximilian of the Holy Roman Empire when I decided that I would reach out my hand and obtain as big a share of the world and its glory as I was able to do,” Esteban began his tale. “Oh, even more than I was able to do, for I intended to go into the area of the impossible. My father the Emperor had given me five realms in Europe and two in Asia, but that was hardly enough to satisfy a shining young man like myself.”

“I have never heard of the Emperor Maximilian having a black son,” Captain Castillo objected in that sunny voice of his.

“Did I say that I was a black person then?” Esteban asked. “No. I was fair of hair and skin. I was tawny as a lion, and as fierce. It was in the course of this heroic adventure that I became black person. Pay attention and do not interrupt. There is a rite and ceremony which is enacted on the day when the son of an Emperor decides to reach out his hand. Certain Jinns (Christians pretend not to know about the Jinns, but the Moslems understand that God created three intelligent species, Angels, Jinns and Humans) come to the son of even a Christian Emperor and pledge themselves to do favors for him and to stand by him in both

success and adversary. They do this because every Jinn is himself the son of an Emperor somewhere. One of them promised me money unending; one of them promised me love unending; one of them promised me adequate might at arms against opponents of ordinary flesh. And so the promises were made by seven of them. But the eighth of them made me an odd and crabbid promise: 'If you are ever in an encounter where you are overmatched,' he said, 'you will have the choice of changing places with your opponent in all ways.' 'It's a favor of which I will have no use,' I said. 'By whom would I be overmatched?'

"With nine hundred and ninety-nine followers, all of them like young lions in their hearts, I conquered three more realms in Europe, three more in Asia, and three in Africa where I had been unrealmid before. Then I came to the central realm of Africa, the Kingdom of Sonrai. We had come over five hundred land leagues of desert to the wonderful City of Timbuktoo the capital of Sonrai which is like a paradise in the middle of the desert. There we met a force ten times our numbering that was captained by the tall and muscular son of King Askia of Sonrai. This son, who was named Esteban, was a great captain of combat. To each of my lion-spirited men he assigned ten of his strong and swift warriors. Each of my men killed the ten men sent against him, but each of my men lost his own life in slaying them. And finally there was nobody left except myself and Esteban the son of King Askia. 'Well, find nine more men somewhere and I will battle you,' I said. 'It is time that I put a finish to this.' 'It is myself and myself,' the big Esteban told me. 'I do not need nine other men. Perhaps you need them, but they will not be provided to you.' We began to fight with swords, and suddenly I was afraid. This Esteban was stronger and quicker than myself.

"His sword was longer and heavier and his shield was taller and more massive. He began to kill me with sure and careful blows, and I caught the frightening scent of my own dead body as it would be by sundown of that day. So, in my mind, I called on the Jinns for help. The first seven of them said 'We have already given you all that we promised to you, money and love and adequate might at arms against opponents of ordinary flesh. It is no fault of ours that this Esteban is of extraordinary and spectacular flesh.'

"'Oh, eighth Jinn, I am overmatched,' I cried then. 'For what it's worth, let me change places with this strong opponent in all ways.' At

once I felt myself to be taller and stronger and faster of hand and arm and body. At once I was handling more easily a longer and heavier sword and taller and more massive shield. And my opponent was no longer a black African man, but a tawny lion man the color of desert sand, and his face was the face that had always been mine. And I saw that I myself now had black hands and arms and legs. So I killed the sand-colored man who had been myself, and cut off his head, and cut his body into four quarters. And by this I myself became Esteban of the spectacular flesh. 'Oh my son!' King Askia of Sonrai cried, and he came and put his arms around me. 'There has never been such a warrior as you since myself in my youth.' So I became Esteban the son of King Askia of Sonrai, and I have been that person ever since. I still have memories of the years when I was the son of Maximilian of the Holy Roman Empire, but that old body of mine has long since turned to dust. I don't know what the original Esteban has memories of or where his essence is now. I guess I am living in that essence. That is my heroic adventure."

"It is a good enough tongue," a Quevenes Indian called Melas said, "but it would be better if we had drummers to drum it and flutes to flute it. It lacks a little without them."

"But when I came upon you, Esteban, you were a boy of no more than thirteen years old," Captain Dorantes said, "and that was thirty-two years after the year 1481 of Restored Salvation."

"Oh, that is a part of a different story," Esteban said, "in which I had found and drunk of the fountain of youth and had become a young boy from it. And in my boyish guise I had wandered away from the Kingdom of Sonrai, and I have lost it this while."

"I'll tell you a tongue of an adventure that I had," said the Quevenes Indian called Glaukos, "which concerned the devil and his ugly sister. This was the devil named Jube, not your own devil named Diablo, who is not a real person."

There were five of them sitting on the mud-sand of Matagorda Bay of the Gulf of Mexico, and the year was probably 1530 or 1531. They were the big black man Esteban of Azamor, and the two Spanish men Captain Dorantes and Captain Castillo. These three were the first great explorers to cross the North American Continent, but there was no one to call them great here. They were temporarily (for more than a year now) slaves of the Quevenes Indian people. And there were two Quevenes Indian men,

Glaukos and Melas. All five of these were 'head-taller men', men who stood a head taller than ordinary humans. All five of them, as it happened, were starving to death. In all other things they were distinctive and did not resemble each other very much.

This area was parched and its grass turned brown and black from lack of rain. Salt water had risen in all their water holes. Black buzzards were hanging in the hot air discussing whether this would be 'carrion evening' or not. They were weighing the five tall men with their hard eyes.

"I was rolling stones with the devil," Glaukos the Quevenes said. "I had a fine stone with six sides, all of them square, and the numbers on it were from one to six. But the devil (you can believe this or not, as you wish) had a stone with one-more-than-six sides to it, and on the extra side was the one-more-than-six number. As you know, we Quevenes have only the six regular numbers, and we have the saying that anything that cannot be counted with six numbers belongs to the devil. Well, that was all right for a saying, but now the devil was claiming that he had beat me at the stone rolling by rolling a number that I could not match, and that I owed him everything I owned, my fish-trap, my bow, my club, my shells and my colored stones, my life, and my death. 'If I owe them then I will pay them,' I said, 'except the last two. I want to keep my life and my death away from you.' We have more communication with Jube the devil than other tribes of people have because we are more evil than other people, more Jube's kind of people. 'I will offer you a barter," the devil .said. 'Marry my sister who is the ugliest woman in the world, and I have not been able to find a husband for her anywhere. In barter for your marrying my sister I will wipe out all the debts you owe me and I will also give to you and your group the most favored land in all the world to live in.' 'I accept that barter,' I said. So I married the sister of Jube the devil, and I and my group received this wonderful land, this bay, these islands, these long necks of land, the smaller bays and smaller islands. It's true that this is the most favored land in the world. We have it good here, and we starve only five moons of the year. What other tribe of people in all the world does not starve it least six or seven moons of the year? And for two moons every year, when the stinker fish are swarming, we become the fattest people all the world. And my wife being the ugliest woman anywhere doesn't bother me at all, since I am the ugliest man. I tell you that there is nobody who call get ahead of me on a barter, not even Jube, the devil.



This is my own tall tongue. It is the life or myself and of all my group.”

“It is a good tall adventure,” Captain Castillo acknowledged. This, as it happened, was in the middle of the five-moon period in which the Quevenes people always starved, and their one black and two white slaves would starve with them. Besides it being the regular starvation season, was a drought in the area this year. The Matagorda Bay (the name meant ‘Fat Bush Bay’ or, ‘Fat Thicket Bay’) was ‘Skinny Bush Bay’ this season.

Oh, there were sand fleas to catch and eat, but it takes 20,000 of them to make a good meal, and it takes five days to catch that many of them. The sand-mud shore of the Matagorda was very low, and it seemed as if they looked up at the hazy green water and its puny waves as they swished over the mud-sand. It was dry in that land and all of their sweet water holes had gone salt.

“I will tell you all an heroic adventure of my own,” Captain Dorantes said. “it happened in the year 1520. Esteban will tell you that it could not have happened, that he was with me every moment of that year. But Esteban is mistaken. He has a forgetfulness of ninety-nine days during which I left him with a pawn broker in the town of Florence, in Italy. ‘Let us step into this pawn shop and see if we can buy a good used falcon cheap,’ I said to Esteban on that day. I am sorry that I just used a Spanish word, but I don’t believe that the Quevenes have such a word or thing as pawn broker.”

“We know what he is,” said the Quevenes called Melis. “He is one who barter all used property and used persons.”

“Yes,” Captain Dorantes said. “I came to the pawn shop in Florence because, whatever people say, one thing is not always as good as another. What I wanted must be of the City-of-Florence sort, and no other variety of it would serve. When I walked into the Florentine pawn shop with Esteban, I gave a secret sign to the pawn broker. He nodded to me. Then he took a needle with a leather bulb attached to it and jabbed it into the arm of Esteban. Esteban immediately became glazed-eyed and out of his wits. The pawn broker took the lid off a clay jar that was taller than a tall man. Then he jabbed Esteban in the buttock with a different sort of needle; and Esteban, still out of his wits, jumped three varas up in the air and came down inside the clay jar. ‘One hundred ducats for him for a hundred days,’ the pawn broker said as he put the lid back on the big jar with Esteban inside it. ‘I agree,’ I told him, and the pawn broker counted

out one hundred gold ducats to in one of the hundred, however, was a Spanish gold ducat, and I had him replace it to me so all of them would be Florentine ducats.

“I’ll work him at night, of course,” the pawn broker said. ‘I have a fulling mill for fulling cloth. It consists of a strong man with a hammer. He will be the strong man. I have a treadmill that squeezes honey out of the reed-canes from overseas that we begin to grow here. I have another treadmill that drives the grinders to mill wheat and barley and rye and millet. These slaves work very hard for me when they are in this mind-captured state, and they do not really suffer. They believe they are only dreaming that they are trudging on worse tread-mills than those in hell and are suffering more hellishly.’

“That is all right,” I said. ‘He is very strong.’ I took my hundred gold Florentine ducats then and I went to Spain. There was a civil war going on in Spain at that time and certain cities had risen against the realm. I served as captain for our brave Emperor of Spain to put down this rebellion. But I also intended to locate and possess the greatest treasure in the world which was buried somewhere under the Alcazar Fortress.

“As captain of infantry forces, I broke the back of the rebellion of the against Spain. ‘Brave Captain Dorantes,’ the Emperor Charles told me, ‘For your services I will pay you almost any sum as reward. I’ll give you twenty gold ducats for having saved Spain.’ “One hundred and twenty,’ I countered him. “Twenty-five,’ he came back at me. ‘One hundred and eighteen,’ I lowered my figure a little. But we finally fastened onto one hundred gold ducats of Spain as the reward for serving the country. I put them in my pocket along with the hundred gold of Florence, and I went to the Alcazar Fortress and down into the cellar of it. Then I went down into the cellar under the first one, and then to a still lower cellar. I knew that the greatest treasure in the world was in the lowest cellar of the Alcazar. I also knew that the monster who guarded it could be bribed, though this was against the common belief that the monster was incorruptible. But he could only be bribed with the gold ducats of Florence. The father of the monster, a Florentine dragon who had been in the service of the Great Lorenzo, had taught that the only trusted specie in the world was the Florentine. So the monster would have nothing to do with the gold ducats of Spain or Naples or Venice or Constantinople.

“I gave the monster (he was of the genus Draco) the one hundred gold

ducats of Florence that I had received from renting out Esteban, and the monster declared me to be the new owner and master of the fortune. I looked at it through the little peep hole into the iron room which contained it, As I had no other place to put it, and no way to carry it away with me, we decided to leave it where it was. The monster transferred the key to the treasure room from one to another of his pockets in token of the changed ownership. So now I am the richest man in the world and the owner of the world's greatest treasure."

"What are 'pockets'?" Glaukos asked. "How many of them did the monster have? Maybe that monster had a good thing going."

"I went back to Florence," Captain Dorantes said. "And I paid the pawn broker back with the one hundred Spanish ducats. He grumbled that he would rather have Florentine ducats, but he accepted the Spanish. The pawn broker wakened Esteban by jabbing him again with a needle in his buttock, and Esteban leaped three varas up in the air and came down outside the clay jar in which he had been living. I set the good used falcon into Esteban's hands as he woke up. 'It is a perfect hunting bird, just what I wanted,' he said. He did not know that ninety-nine days had passed since we had first entered the pawn shop. He thought it had only been an instant.

"The pawn broker gave me one of the motivating sort of needles just to show what a pleasure it was to do business with me. I have it yet. I can, but I will not, jab Esteban in the buttock with it and he will leap three varas into the air and land in a clay jar, though I don't know where the jar will have come from. This is the heroic account of how I became the owner of the greatest treasure in the world."

"If you make me leap three varas into the air, you will be the clay jar that I will come down in the middle of," Esteban told Captain Dorantes, "and I will come down hard."

Matagorda Bay is not the hottest place in the world. It is no more than the third or fourth hottest ordinarily, though now it was a little bit hotter than that because of the long dry weather. It is not the most stinking place in the world. It is about the fifth most stinking. The mosquitos there are not the largest in the world. They are only the eighth largest. But if the Matagorda was not the worst place in the world, neither was it the best. The official name of the place was Holy Ghost Bay, but the Holy Ghost had traded it off to Jube the devil.

“I’ll tell you the tongue how I became the greatest hunter in the world,” the Quevenes Indian named Melas said. “I had always been a great runner. I could run so far and so fast because I imitated the running animals: the wolf for the long hard run, and the mountain lion for the shorter bursts of steep speed. A man can sometimes run down a deer by himself, but he does it by running like the running animals. I ran so much like them that I became them. I ran down on four legs. I leaped. I pounced. I was the tireless wolf for most of the chase, and then I was the leaping mountain lion for the catch and the kill. Persons who saw me running in those ways thought that I was a wolf and a mountain lion. I felt myself to be them too. And so I was them. I would rise in front of the deer in my wolf form and send the deer running wildly across the prairie. And then I would circle around it and get ahead of it again. I was able to do this because when I tired myself out running as a wolf I would change, and then I would have the rested strength of the mountain lion still waiting for me to use. And then, when the myself-as-lion ram, the myself-as-wolf rested; but the itself-as-deer never got to rest. So I am able to drive most of the deer where I want them, and I kill most of them in my own area here. When I kill one, I bury it in the sand-mud for three days to rot a little and to become loose in the joints and easy to devour. And I did that with a deer just three days ago. I had forgotten about it, but now the smell of that deer comes to my nostrils. So we will dig it up and eat it when the sun has dropped one bow-length lower.

“But first I must tell you that all deer are not as they seem. Some of them are human people. Young women and girls like to run in the form of doe deers, and they cannot change back into their human form while they are being hunted and kept on the move. It is a sort of summer moon-madness that compels them, some of them quite young girls, to run across the grassy plains and on the edges of the salt marshes as doe deers. And some of the young men like to run in the form of buck deers. I believe it is persons blowing on little cottonwood flutes who set them onto this notion of turning into deers and running. Seven years ago, a young woman of this region gave birth to a little fawn deer. And I think it must have been that both herself and her young man were running and playing in the deer form when they mated.

“When you kill a human in the deer form, then it dies as a deer and you bury it as a deer. But when you dig it up to eat it three days later, you

may find that it is the dead body of a human person. I myself have got several bleak surprises this way, once digging up the body of one of my daughters that I had buried as a killed deer, once digging up the body of one of my sons in the same kind of event. I have digged up five different human persons that I have buried as deers. They all have a whiff on them a little bit different from that. Of those who are both buried and dug up as I think I catch that little-bit-different whiff now, from a mud mound only six paces from here. When the sun has dropped another half bow-length, we will dig it up and see which it is; but I will put another log on the fire now to be ready. And when we have dig it up and roasted it a little bit, we will eat it with either a sad or a happy stomach, whatever the case may be.”

Well, they were hungry. They needed big meat of some kind.

“I also have an heroic story-adventure to tell,” Captain Castillo said. “It is not that I myself am a hero either inside or outside of the story. It is that I have been in places that were themselves heroic, that I have washed in heroic sunshine and heroic water, and I have walked on heroic hills, aye, and in heroic skies. But what I am going to do now is live out a small heroic adventure rather than tell it.

“John writes in his Apocalypse ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no sea. I believe that this passage as we have it is somehow incomplete. A seaman once spoke to me of this very passage ‘If there is no sea there, then I won’t go.’ But I believe there will be a new ocean, one of sheer crystal, and that John somehow forgot to mention it. I am a man who is in love with water, even such rotten water as surrounds us here.

“I have been called a dreamy man; and all my life I have dreamed (both sleeping and waking) of blessed and crystalline water of every form. When I became a doctor of medicine, this dream of sweet waters went through my healing. When I became a captain of soldiers, the oceanness of writhing waters ran through all my authority. I have walked on arcliing bridges of water; not of ice, but of water. I have climbed cliffs of water and lived in water castles. And I’ve gone down into watery caverns deeper than the dolphins can go.

“I believe that water is the same as grace when it falls as rain on the earth. I believe that an insufficiency of sweet water is meant to be a pang and a punishment, and that the present salt swamps of the Matagorda are

the salt swamps of Purgatory itself. But I also maintain that every person and group can say when his sentence and punishment has gone on long enough. I am about to say it now.

“I myself have been given powers. I am able to lock up a sky so that neither rain nor grace may fall upon a region, though I have never done that. Now I believe that I have the power to open a clogged sky so that rain and grace may fall again.”

“Not quite yet,” said the Quevenos man named Glaukos. “Let us set the rocks above the fire first to make a roof over it.” They had two very large flat rocks, and it took all five of the powerful men to work together to lift each of them. They lifted them and set them on a frame of sticks and stones about the height of a man above the hearth stone. It would shed rain pretty well. It would protect the fire.

By the time the hearth was roofed, the armadillos had arrived. They stood and rattled their armor, and whimpered. There were five of these armadillos in a small tribe that had come for the last four days and rattled insistently. The men always knew what the little armored beasts wanted, that they should dig with their spade deeper into the sand-mud than the animals could dig. For four days, in response to their whimpering, Esteban had dug with the spade more than eight feet deep. Each day the animals had gone down to the water that seeped into the hole, and had found it salt, and had gone away sorrowful. If there was any sweet water at all it would ride on top of the heavier salt water. Today the armadillos came even less hopefully than before. If they did not find sweet water today they would die. So Esteban began to dig another deep hole. And Captain Dorantes and the Quevenes called Melas set out all their clay pots and bowls to catch the rain.

“There is a small cloud,” Captain Castillo was saying. “I command that it become a big cloud and that it come over us. I command it as a natural element, and I pray to the Holy Ghost that it may happen.”

“This man does not know how to command!” the Quevenes called Glaukos jeered. “It is I who command it! Tremble, cloud, and come.”

“Let us all command, exhort, pray, and cajole the cloud at the same time,” Esteban boomed reasonably enough from the hole he was digging. And the five of them, the Captains Dorantes and Castillo, the African Black Esteban, the two Quevenes Indians Glaukos and Melas, all commanded and reasoned and prayed and cajoled.

Then something began to happen with a jolt, as if the machinery of the sky had made a mechanical shift.

“I can feel that the tide has turned in our favor,” Captain Castillo said.

“The tide is too slow and too sour,” Glatikos admonished. “Has the cloud turned in our favor?” He was watching it with his ugly face intently upraised.

Yes it had. The little white cloud that had intended to pass them to the north was now veering back towards them. It turned black and enlarged itself. It filled the sky over their heads and began to rain on them, softly and steadily.

“Men, do not just stand there!” the Quevenes called Melas cried. “When there is one good luck try for another one immediately before the first one grows cold. We may yet have meat that we will not have to shudder at when we eat. Help me dig out the buried deer. With our new running luck, it will still be deer when we dig it out and eat it.”

Esteban came out of his dug water hole with his spade. The armadillos tumbled down into it and howled with delight to find sweet water. Of course it was sweet. The rain water was pouring down into that hole in little torrents. Then Esteban with the spade, and others with rocks and sticks to dig with, uncovered the body of the buried deer. At first it seemed that they had uncovered the face of a human girl, but that was only the tricky afternoon light coming fractured through the rain into the burial hole. It was a doe deer of incomparably gentle expression. It was mildly rotten. It had become loose in the joints and would be easy to dismember and roast and devour. So they dug it out of the hole.

The deer skinned easily, the mild rot helping. It unjointed easily. Bigger pieces went directly into the flat fire in the hearth stone, and smaller pieces were spitted in the flint-fire for quicker charring and eating. The man divided the tongue of the deer, into five parts, one for each of them, for they were all tongue men this day.

“Your tongue, your story was the strongest, water-master,” the Quevenes Glaukos told Captain Castillo. “It brought rain for our dying piece of land and good water for our sandy throats.”

“No, my tongue, my story was the strongest,” the Quevenes Melas contradicted. “It brought deer meat and saved us from starvation. My mind was confused with my hunger and I did not even remember that I had killed and buried a deer three days ago. Then my ‘tongue’ which I

told recalled the happening to my mind, so we do not have to starve to death after all. And now our luck has changed to the good. The black buzzards are gone out of the sky, and the white gulls have come to bounce and lioller in the raiiiy air. Gulls are good luck birds.”

Five heroic stories! Five heroic tongues! (The Quevenes Indians call a ‘story’ a ‘tongue’.) The five tongues hadn’t resembled each other very much. They had only one thing in common: all of them had been true.

“I feel it,” Esteban said. “Something is flowing for us now. Howl, tongue, howl! Burned yourself, didn’t you? You knew you’d get burned if you tried that piece of deer meat while it was still hot. But it’s better than starving.”

“I also feel the power flowing in our favor,” Captain Dorantes said. “Oh, from this moment on, greatness has found us!”

“A wonderful tide and a wonderful favor,” Captain Castillo said. “We will not die in this miserable place. We will travel five hundred hard land leagues to get to other places, but then we will have our crystal day in the sun, in the new sun.”

The five armadillos waddled off, fat-stomached from the new water they had drunk. They were making satisfied and thankful grunts. They raised their tails in going-away salutes as they passed. Even their skinny tails had row after row of skinny armored scale plates.



## **MAKE SURE THE EYES ARE BIG ENOUGH**

It rings like happy thunderclap, The nine-tenths world of clown. It's 'Things Returned' with sop and hap. It's circus Game to town.

A discovery was made in the field of phenomenal psychology early this week. It consisted of opening the eyes and seeing the nine-tenths of the world that had previously been invisible. The discovery was simply there for persons of a certain type, and it had not been there before.

It had been there for certain kids for at least a day. Then it had been there for a tyrannical old lady named Mary Imperial McSlim, and she found it so amazing that she decided to keep it for herself. But the next noontime it was there for her grandson Rusty McSlim, the great phenomenal psychologist, and he was excited enough about it to want to share it with the entire world, And that evening it was experienced by a dozen of McSlim's great colleagues whom he had called together to tell about it. That was when the thing was effectively there.

But three others of the colleagues who were present didn't experience it at all. They even said that it was another sample of McSlim's droll humor.

The new experience or discovery was a wider range of seeing and sensing. It was the quick cognition of animations and people and off-people and pantograms and joyous beasts and monsters that had heretofore been invisible. It was seeing the other nine-tenths of the world in its racing brightness, and the realizing that the one-tenth of the world that had always been visible was comparatively a little bit sub-par. It was — well, it was the sensual pleroma, the fulfillment, the actualization, all this laced with the excited "Hey, where have you guys been!" motif.

Mary Crisis McSlim, a kid and the daughter of Rusty McSlim, had seen the enlarged scene earliest; but the first accountable or adult person to see it had been her great-grandmother Mary Imperial McSlim, the grandmother of Rusty McSlim the great phenomenal psychologist. And old Mary Imperial had seen that enlarged world by a peculiar arrangement.

Great-grandmother Mary Imperial was an old tyrant, and now fate had punished her for her tyrannies. She was confined to her bed for the rest of her life. She had always wanted to see everything, and now she couldn't. So the great Rusty McSlim fixed it so that his afflicted

grandmother could see with the happy and hungry eyes of his lively daughter, Mary Crisis, who ran everywhere and saw everything.

All that Rusty had to do was drill a small hole through the lachrymal crest of his daughter, between the bridge of her nose and her left eye socket (Mary Crisis was left-eyed), and set a mini-probe into the lacob's membrane at the back of her eye. And the probe was attached by tight magnetic couple to a little recording retro-camera made to hook over the left ear of Mary Crisis. Mary Crisis didn't like it hanging on her ear though, so she wore it stuck with chewing gum in the corner of her eyebrow. This, of course, gave much greater fidelity to the running pictures.

The camera was a small cube about two millimeters on a side. If it had used a lens of its own instead of the lens in the left eye of Mary Crisis, it would need to be at least four millimeters on a side, and Mary Crisis might have let it get covered up or she would have forgotten to turn it on. But she turned on her own eyes automatically.

Every afternoon when Mary Crisis came in from her lively day, she would click that day's picture-capsule (a cube about one millimeter on a side) out of the little camera and give it to her great-grandmother Mary Imperial. And old Mary Imperial would put it in her projector and watch it for several happy hours, seeing everything that the hungry eyes of Mary Crisis had seen that day, and seeing it all with the immediacy and buoyancy that Mary Crisis contributed to it. And the great-grandmother would go, in surrogate fashion, everywhere that Mary Crisis and her three best friends, Eustace Riggles, Bravura Jones, Henry Gusset, had gone that day.

Well, Mary Imperial couldn't see with the eyes of the three friends of Mary Crisis, but Mary C was clearly the wide-eyed and hungry-eyed one of the group. Eustace was all ears, Henry was all mouth, and Bravura was all motion; and she was almost always in the field of vision of Mary C anyhow. And what the eyes of Mary C did bring was a varied panorama of the pulsing world containing everything from giggling cows to new-born birds and city traffic.

Giggling cows? Yes, for the last couple of days there had been giggling cows.

This surrogate seeing had become a big and sustaining thing in the life of old Mary Imperial, and she prayed that nothing would ever go wrong

with the arrangement. But it was a ten-fold bonus for her when everything suddenly went exuberantly right with the surrogate living and viewing.

On the evening of the record, she saw the already lively world as greatly magnified and wonderfully exploded and fantastically added to. She saw 'our companions and friends', the aura of other creatures with which we are usually invisibly surrounded. And a great quantum stop in perception had been made.

How thin and tinny and how few in number had been the objects in our old field of view! How mediocre in color and how undistinguished in style it had all been! How un-flamboyant the world had been before this! She viewed for quite a few hours.

Then she buzzed for her great-granddaughter Mary Crisis just at midnight, and Mary C came almost instantly from her bed. People always came almost instantly when Mary Imperial buzzed for them.

"You saw so many additional things today, Mary C, such enhanced things, such a mass of wonderful things and people. How?" she asked.

"I don't know. All my gang saw the new people and things and whirlings today. We say it's the circus come to town, the Big Circus this time. We keep seeing and knowing more and more guys and their dogs, some of those dogs twenty-five feet long; and they're all so friendly and monstrous looking. We keep getting hit, 'bop!', by more and more colors and better ones. Have a stick of Sappy-Happy Chewing Gum, G-G Mother. Open up and live a little."

"You know that civilized people don't chow gum, sappy-happy great-granddaughter of mine. There has been a premonition of this for several days. Do those giggling cows in Monaghan's meadow have anything to do with these new things?"

"Yes, I think so," Mary Crisis said. "They started before this other business started, maybe two days before. They had already been giggling for quite a while before we began to see the Big Circus. I think that they were already seeing what we saw today."

There was an incredible advance and expansion in the seeing adventure, that's what it was. There had never been anything like it for a long, long time. When medium-early man had suddenly acquired color-vision and so moved out of the old black-and-gray dinginess, that must have been something of the same explosive and emerging experience.

But the old tyrant Mary Imperial didn't get all of it. She got only the visual part, and she got that second hand. She should have opened up and lived a little, as Mary Crisis told her. But she missed it by declining the symbol that was more than a symbol.

Rusty McSlim caught the full phenomenon about noon the next day, and he didn't know what triggered it. It wasn't something he had eaten; he hadn't eaten anything that day yet. It came onto him like a big door banging open and letting in endless masses of sunshine and color, all of them inhabited by stimulating creatures that Rusty felt he knew from somewhere.

Rusty was an acute observer of the phenomenon from the time it first came to him, and he had more than just a 'seeing' of the new throngs of creatures, human, quasi-human, way-off-human, and comically and rampantly animal.

Besides the seeing of these folk he also had the bountiful smells of them. Hey, the odd creatures do smell good when you catch them at full whiff! And he heard them, with other ears, with old pointed ears that he had forgotten about having. He did not hear by conventional sound that is often irritating, but by the most wonderful invention ever, sound without noise! And he understood the 'talk' of these nations of creatures, though perhaps it should be called 'communication' rather than literal 'talk'.

And he also had a great new comprehension by that blending of all the senses (the 'common sense' in the old meaning) whose organ of perception is located just below the fontanel of the head.

Rusty McSlim observed and reveled, and nided his time. This was almost too much to take in at once. These newly-visible folks ran from typhoeans (extreme types, they) to very close cousins of humans. And the new-appeared animals had a much wider range, though there were no strict rules for determining which were mere animals and which were intellectual quasi-humans. Rusty spoke civilly when he was spoken to, but he did not yet take any initiatives.

But, that evening, Rusty convoked a group of his close associates; and twelve of his fifteen gathered colleagues experienced the whole fulfilment. All of them were phenomenal psychologists, and so they knew the importance of recording their impressions. Most of them spoke their observations into their recorders (which phenomenal psychologists even

take to bed with them); and at the same time they set four panoramic cameras to gobbling everything up.

But the most startling observation that they made was that the observing was a two-way street. The ‘now-appearance persons’ were regarding the human psychologists as themselves being new and they were quite interested in them. Some of these appearances, a ‘first-time-ever-seen’ quasi-humans were recording their own observations of the McSlim group.

There was one large near-human person who was really a jolly green giant, but done with quite a bit more style than the giant of the old advertisements.

“Out of mythology!” the green giant gasped and grinned. “I never expected anything this exciting. You are creatures right out of mythology!” And he had his own recorder switches on to catch his own jolly green comments. “Amazing,” he said, “You really are amazing!”

That was a recorder the big green person was using?

“Let me see that, let me see that!” cried Doctor Darrel Dogstar whose real field was electronic psychology. “We don’t have anything as smooth and sophisticated as that, not at any price.”

“Oh, it’s just a little knock-about model. It is good to see you folks, really good to see you! Every new acquaintance we make enlarges all of us,” the jolly green person was speaking to Darrel Dogstar who was examining the smooth and sophisticated recorder. “We always suspected that you were there. You had to be there to to explain certain eccentricities in the animate continuum, but we could never see you or sense you before. We considered filling you with luciferic fluid to make you visible in outline, but that is a little bit like putting salt on the tail of a pterosaur: you have to catch it first. And now you are apparently lit up by some chemical accident, and we can see and sense you almost as easily as we can see ourselves and persons of the other participating groups. Well, we have caught a group of you here now, and we have filled you with luciferic fluid, unbeknownst to yourselves; so we will still be able to see you even if the effect of your chemical accident wears off. And it won’t matter whether you continue to see us or not. We know what we look like and we don’t need you to confirm it. And yet we welcome you as a participating species, if you are such.”

“To us, this is a total surprise,” Rusty McSlim spoke in honest

humility. “We hadn’t even an inkling of your existence.”

“Not so, not so!” half of McSlim’s colleagues leaped to lie about the situation. “Of course we knew that you existed, most of you. Your existence was mandatory for the operation of some of our psychological equations.”

The sense of touch was the only one not in full scope here. The entities of some of the different orders couldn’t touch each other, though to a limited extent (the limit was the strength of the electrical or coronal discharge experienced in touching alien tools) they could handle each others’ artifacts.

“It may be a peculiar question,” hazarded Doctor Jorkus Halliburton whose forte was astral psychology, “but what year is this where you are? Is it with you as it is with us?” He asked this of one of the beautiful fish-faced people.

“Oh, we don’t use years,” said that beautiful person, “and ‘here’ is where we are. Years are so temporal. You will notice that only the wavering and changeable species use them, only about half of the species who are members of the ‘great visibility’. You should know that yourselves still haven’t become visible to all the species here present. Try harder.”

“We don’t know what to call all of you. If we call you ‘people’ there may be some confusion,” said Doctor Lollie Lindwurm who was about as phenomenal a psychologist as you’ll find. “We just aren’t the same. We are impressed by you, but you make up a very odd cousinship for ourselves. The green giant says that we are creatures out of mythology, but I believe that some of you entities are angelic messengers ascending and descending on Jacob’s Ladder.”

“Not many of us are angelic messengers,” said a lizard-faced person of one of the cousinly species. “Hardly one in a thousand. It’s probably at least as frequent among you as among most of us. Generally we are in horizontal or ‘big circle’ relationship with each other, and there isn’t much ascending or descending to it. Up with the lateral movement! That’s what I always say. Oh, are you old enough to have known Jacob, female cousin?”

“There seem to be fewer outright animals and more quasi-people among you now than there were when I was out and about today,” Rusty McSlim said.

“We’re indoors now,” answered a lordly type, probably a thunderman, “and the larger beasts are left outdoors.”

“You site] that we are apparently lit up by a chemical accident,” Daniel Dogstar essayed. “But why do you think that our breakthrough is an especially chemical one?”

“Oh, you’re a chemical species,” a fine-looking, rubbery, frog-faced person said, “just as I myself belong to all Urstuff species, lion-molecular and non-all-that-detail. You are not so much creatures right out of mythology as you are creatures right out of a chemistry book. You remind me of some of the cartoon characters in Elementary Basic Chemistry Number One. You yourself, entity Dogstar, are an almost perfect depiction of the protean spirit of Protein as drawn in our elementary texts. You are hinged and articulated just as a protein molecule is. We ourselves, I’m afraid, do not offer such graphic insights into any of the disciplines. I can see that it’s going to be a real bash, exploring you people who have always been invisible to us. I love alien encounter.

“But you must understand that your being made manifest isn’t really an unusual thing. It is only that some of us have not personally encountered an instance of it before. A new species is added to the community of the ‘great visibility’ every aeon or so, and now it is your turn to be added. And you will be added, though there may be a little bit of that ‘watch those bumps!’ experience for two or three days as you cross the threshold.”

2

What happy incremental eyes! What newly opened door! The ‘rest of world’ in weirdly-wise Reunions us, and more.

More about this evening meeting cannot be given right here and now. Doctor Darrel Dogstar got his book First-Ever Meeting with the Simultaneous Aliens into print and on sale within eleven hours, and he has writs out to prevent anyone else describing the full conversations and congresses that went on that night. The writs will run out, of course, after the book has enjoyed its three full days on sale: but this is ‘now’ and not three days from now.

But almost all who had been present had good feelings about that meeting, especially the part about the human beings being taken for creatures right out of mythology. And the ‘happiness motif’ was very strong in the encounter, strong beyond the ability of words to describe.

The reunion with our kindred was just about the juiciest well of euphoria ever tapped.

But, next day, some of the colleagues gradually lost their power of seeing the invisible; and by noon that power was gone from them. Only two of them, besides McSlim, retained the rapport and the seeing. And yet that was the day when several million persons in the United States, substantial numbers in the Netherlands, and scatterings of folks in England, France, Germany, Turkey, Japan, and Australia began to see and to sense in the full way, to make contact with what they were already calling 'the other nine-tenths of the world', with the qtiasi-people and quasi-animals and quasi-spooks.

So the experience was valid in that it had been partaken of by several million people: and it looked as though it would soon be shared by hundreds and thousands of millions, by almost everybody. And yet the encounter itself could not be considered as fully verified until it was known how it happened, until it was known why it happened to some people only and not to all, and until it could be brought about at will.

So the hunt for an effector was on. If one computer with one car-load of data couldn't find it, then perhaps a hundred computers with ten thousand carloads of data could find it.

Why had the new power come to only a few millions of people and not to the hundreds of millions and the billions? Were the people who recieved the power all of one type? And what were the characteristics of that type? What particular thing did the people of the 'new seeing' eat or smell or drink or stick in their ears? What thing, that the people lacking the power did not use?

The people who had managed the 'Big See', well, they had been rather kiddish people, and four-fifths of them were kids indeed. They were breezy and easy. They were un-intricate, even when they were rather intelingent. They were casual. They were at the same time rapid and relaxed.

Or (and this may be important) they were folks who had been in the company of such casual people when they first experienced the new powers: and they just may have shared some triggering, lifestyle item of the casual people.

No, one computer couldn't solve it, and one hundred couldn't. But two hundred and twelve computers were able to do it in a little less than two



hours. They got it down to about two million possible items, and then everybody knew that the hunt was almost over with. And quickly the computers had it down to a single item, verified and certain.

The item, of course, was Sappig-Happig Chewing Gum, called Sappy-Happy by the children in the United States. And everybody said “Why didn’t I guess that?” when the computers had worked out the answer. What else could it have been? It’s name in Dutch meant ‘Juicy Keen’ or ‘Juicy Slurp’, and the gum was a product of the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company, their newest flavor of chewing gum which brought their total flavors to the number of sixty-six. Chewing gum was now one of the thousands of things made out of petroleum in the attempt to reduce the glut of all oil products. And the largest gum factories, including those of Royal Dutch Shell, were in the United States where the chewing gum habit was the largest.

So it was announced to the world that the enabling factor for the ‘big see’ was this new and exotic flavor of chewing gum. Then everybody began to chew Sappig-Happig gum; and another hundred million persons in the world enjoyed the larger vision and the acquaintance of their near cousins who had been till now invisible. A billion persons in the world would have enjoyed the larger vision that day except that the world supply of Sappig-Happig ran out without even reaching most of the world.

Never mind that; it would be produced and allocated quickly, tomorrow enough for a billion people, the next day enough for nine billion, so that each person could have at least one package to tide him over until full production could be achieved. And there was even the belief that the chewing gum with its enabling ingredient, whatever it was, was only the nose of a great many-faceted chemical advent for the fulfillment of mankind.

The ‘Reunion of the Peoples’ was a stupendous thing. The ‘Big See’ was an ‘event for ten thousand years’. “It’s a world so much bigger than we thought it was” was a frequent comment by people who had had the new sight. It couldn’t all have been comprehended in a day or a week, and something less than a week has so far been allotted to it.

In the context of the ‘Big See’ the laws of numbers and space became more lenient. For, considering how many of the new creatures there were probably ten times as many as the old creatures, there wasn’t much

crowding. And there wasn't any strong feeling of inferiority in the humans over the new relationships, for the humans were at least halfway up the hierarchy of creatures.

The new animals, seen for the first time, were really more striking and more varied than the new 'people' ("It's like wildest Africa raised many powers," somebody said about those new animals), but only a few of the 'old animals', some of the cattle, a few of the horses, as yet seemed to be aware of them. The 'giggling cattle' found here and there apparently found the 'new visibilities' friendly and risible, and they took delight in them.

And the now Flora-now-become-visible were solid achievements. There were trees so much taller and stronger and better-done than the trees that had been visible before. There were bushes that were Bushes, there was grass that was Grass. And even the unliving landscapes were superior. The simultaneous rivers were much more rampant and distinguished than any known before, more 'riverly'. The hills, the plains, the mountains, oh they were giantized, and yet they didn't deform or destroy the old landscape. It was just that about nine more aspects of the world were now known.

And when the other nine-tenths of the 'old people' should be able to see the other nine-tenths of the living world that had heretofore been invisible (and that shouldn't be later than the end of this week) then a new phase of humanity and of the world would be realized.

But the new batch of Sappig-Happig chewing gum was a bummer. Not only was it a little bit weak on chewability, but it was completely lacking in the 'Big See' qualities.

So the people of the world suffered severe withdrawal symptoms, even that great majority who had not yet experienced that expansive opening. People went very sour then and they downplayed yesterday's exciting phenomena. They were told that the great thing would come again sorely in a day or two, but they were skeptical about the whole business.

Critics claimed that the fact that the made-visible 'cousins' spoke in the observers' own language, whether English or Dutch or Japanese, proved that the whole syndrome of events was subjective and fictitious. And yet all the more discerning witnesses had said that the new folks had not exactly 'spoken' to them but only that they had 'communicated' with them as clearly and naturally as if they were speaking in words.

And others said that the whole complex was no more than a psychological quirk, a substitution. It was the case of inadequate persons having alienated themselves from human friends by their difficult personalities, and then imagining crowds of new friends who should be a bit different than the objectionable humans, after much superior to them. These same critics pointed out that the chewing of gum is itself a psychological quirk and a substitution, an activity without content indulged in by persons who were themselves without content, a noisy gnawing on virtual nothingness. And many said that the whole affair was only a soap-bubble, a day-fly, rather colorful and striking for a short moment; and now that moment was gone.

The entire complexity and recognition was denigrated as being messianic, millennial, chiliastic, soteriological, pleratic, and silly. Strong words, those! It was even called Orwellian and big-brotherish.

But thoughtful persons who had themselves experienced the 'Big See' knew that it had been a foot-in-the-door beyond which door the other nine-tenths of the world was really to be found.

But dashed hope was huge and world-wide.

But new hopes were springing up like springtime flowers. There was a total investigation of the chewing gum affair. And the enabling or triggering element that had been in the introductory batch would be identified and reconstituted.

Within one hour, the world-wide investigation converged on one man, one "Flavor-Master" at the largest gum factory. His name was John Mastic, and he had been a Flavor-Master for twenty-seven years.

"I am an artist," John Mastic told the articulated investigators. "When I mix the First batch of a new Flavor, I am painting a dawn, I am composing a symphony, I am creating a folk drama, I am bringing up cool deep meanings from the cellar of the soul, I am setting the juice of life to flowing. Each first batch of a new flavor is blended in this one big vat here in the amount of about eighty thousand kilograms.

"Yes, I am careful to jot down everything that I put in. And then if the flavor catches on, it can be duplicated in any of the factories. Oh, there was the basic chickle first, there were a hundred kilos of essence of walnuts, there was lemon and citron, there were the four sorts of sugar, there was the coconut fibre. There was the powdered graphite to give it slipability. There was the mint and the wormwood. And there were our

own patented Sialogogue Number Nine which no other chewing gum manufacturer is able to dilplicate. And there were twenty thousand kilos of synthetic corn cobs, made from crude oil, to give it chewability. That's it."

"We have the list", the articed investigators said, "and, yes, it agrees with what you remember. But some element is missing, missing."

"Can't think of what it could be," John Mastic answered cheerfully. And the articed investigators left him with end-of-the-roadish expressions on their faces.

"I forgot to tell those fellows that I used four thousand kilos of Youngman's Royal Range Pellets in place of the same weight of synthetic corn cobs," John Mastic told himself three minutes later. "The market is so mixed up lately that range pellets are actually cheaper than synthetic corn cobs (both of them largely made out of petroleum), and the chewability element is at least equal in the pellets. I can't see where it would make any difference though."

"Why don't we have the Lord Protector of the United States in Washington get together with the Lord Protectors of all the other countries and declare a world crisis," Mary Crisis McSlim asked her father Rusty McSlim. "That's the only thing to get something done, to make a world crisis out of it."

"Now, I don't think we'll need a world crisis at all, Mary C," Rusty said.

"Need it! New-creature hokey, we want it! There is nothing like a world crisis to get people stirred up. Why do you think we won't need it, papa?"

"Ah, I just heard cockroaches giggling in the pantry. When even cockroaches see the 'Big See', can people be far behind?"

"For a bunch of giggling cockroaches you'd throw away the opportunity for a world crisis? Oh, you shatter me," Mary Crisis said.

In two days, they still haven't been able to reconstitute any Sappig-Happig chewing gum containing the 'Big See' qualities. Nevertheless, four or five hundred million persons in the world are already onto the expanded vision without it. It will succeed, with chemicals or without, with substitutes and surrogates, or by sudden combinations. The odds are too high (the acquisition of the missing nine-tenths of the world) to give up easily.

The cows are still giggling their delight in Monaghan's meadow, and they are still munching those good Youngman's Royal Range Pellets. Those happy cattle are surely enjoying the 'Big See' yet.

And so are other things.

Gar-fish are giggling in the lakes. Honker geese are giggling in their skies and in their swamps. Earthworms are giggling in the ground, and squirrels are chortling in the hickory trees. And many of these species have neither eaten Youngman's Royal Range Pellets nor chewed Sappy-Happy gum. The Fish-and-Game Department guys are reporting happier species by the hour.

It is a many-fronted chemical advent, a world-wide movement. It has come to the gophers in their tunnels. It will come even to the lords of creation very soon, maybe even to the rest of them today. And when it comes, it will be a nine hundred percent gain in everything. May our eyes be big enough to take it all in! Don't let any of us be left out.

What's that funny noise in the front yard?

It's giggling moles tearing up the ground. But they are seeing the 'Big See' too.

## MARSILIA V

“The Island of New Guinea is a nearly submerged mountain-range in the shape of a bird. And the Vogelkop Peninsula is the head of the bird. The Flora is the most fantastic in the world. The Fauna, to me, is less so.”

That was the entry in the notebook of Lieutenant Littlejohn. The lieutenant was unfortunate in his family name. A burly man might carry a name like Littlejohn without notice. The lieutenant could not, for he was small. He was unable, by taking thought, to add anything at all to his apparent age. He was an unfinished spooky colt. And his sterile upper lip quivered when he was excited.

In bare lip, he was unique in the battery. Every other man had grown a whacker of a moustache in the nine months they had been on Guinea. Two hundred and thirty-three men in the battery had grown moustaches. One, Lieutenant Littlejohn, had not.

Actually, he was unable to grow one, but it was believed that he could have done it if he had tried hard enough. Charley Redwolf had grown one, and Charley was an Indian. Indians grow them with difficulty, and Charley had done it on sheer determination. He had sunned his upper lip for an hour a day with a handkerchief over the top part of his face. He had followed the advice of a Melanesian boy and every night he had applied wisps of kunai grass soaked in the urine of the Cuscus or Coconut Possum. Redwolf hadn't done much else in those nine months, but he had grown a moustache.

There was a strong feeling in the battery that Lieutenant Littlejohn could have done it also if he'd had the heart for it. Littlejohn was not greatly respected by the men.

He was left much in peace now, but it hadn't always been so. He had abandoned some of his more interesting hobbies, and others he now carried out furtively. He had given up his butterfly collecting entirely for the length of his service. There is a stigma attached to a butterfly collector. There are several men even today who will do imitations of Littlejohn and his net, and these imitations are hilarious.

And yet, what's so bloody funny about it? Butterflies are interesting, and the net is the proper instrument for taking them. And some truly fantastic varieties had been seen at the stop-off stations of the battery.

But on Guinea, things were better. Here everybody became odd, so

individual oddities were less noticed. Littlejohn wandered by himself through the jun-les. He went up and over the cliffs, and down deep ravines. He learned which of the boggy meadows could be crossed and which could not.

And when he came to very secluded pools, he stripped and swam. But these had to be secluded. Even so, he often heard mocking whistles as of jungle birds. Few birds were unknown to the lieutenant, and he knew the names of two of these whistlers. They were Sergeant Rand and Corporal Mueller.

And Littlejohn made entries and drawings in the notebooks that he always carried with him. He drew in a boyish and unsure hand, plants, trees, rivers, rocks, insects. He named and classified and described them, as —

“*Marsilia Vogelkopiensis*. Pteridophyta. Hydropteridales. Of the Water Fern Family. Four-lobed leaf. Of a green-purple color that I have never before encountered in nature. The unusual aspect of this *Marsilia* is that the Sporophyte is not truly aquatic. It drifts on a morasmal underlay. Reproduction is heterosporous.”

Littlejohn always carried a rock liammer and a thimble-sized bottle of reagents. And lie read the rocks as if they were newspapers.

PFC Hebert, the tough Cajun, and his shadow, PFC Brooks, came on him one day.

“Ah, Lieutenant Renoncule, are you looking for gold?” asked Hebert.

“Not in particular, Soldat Croupe d’un Raton.”

“You shouldn’t have called me that, Liuetenant.”

“You shouldn’t have called me Buttercup. I realize that I am known so, but not commonly to my face.”

“I didn’t know you understood. Are you looking for gold?”

“No. Though I come on traces of it several times a day.”

“Where you got your stash? There should be someone like us who knows.”

“There is no stash. I do not collect it. it would not be remunerative.”

“Yeah? How remunerative wouldn’t it be?”

“A diligent man, working in the most promising streams, might realize eight or ten cents worth a day.”

“Maybe you realize more than that. Maybe you are real diingent. We will be watching.”

They were large, rough men. Good hearted though; just mean everywhere else.

Littlejohn made a further entry in his notebook —

“I have discovered an entirely new variety of crow or rook today. So far I have heard only its distant ‘caw’ and found one feather, and that quite old. Yet I know that they go together. I will soon have proof. This will shake ornithology to its roots.”

2

Captain Robinson was sad. He had become infested with small guests and had had to shave all the hair off his body. The prickling, now in its second day, had become intolerable. And he had one other worry.

“Who’m I going to send?” he barked at T”3 Carp who was acting First Sergeant on loan to headquarters. “Lively made the last three. I can’t send him all the time. Who’m I going to send?”

“There’s only one left. You’ll have to send Buttercup.”

“Buttercup! He couldn’t lead a detail of girl scouts from here to the moss tent.”

“I doubt if he could, but this will only be a routine patrol. It shouldn’t take more than twenty men to do it, and finish it in twenty-four or thirty hours. You could send Rand and Mueller along as sergeant and corporal, and they can take care of anything. We have a pretty rough bunch in our battery, so there’s not much to worry about.”

“The rough bunch is what I’m worrying about. It’s like sending a little boy into a wolf den. But I can’t be holding an umbrella over him forever. You tell him, and then you brief him. They’d better leave about midnight, and they can lay up close before dawn and operate by daylight.”

“All right. I wouldn’t worry. Lieutenant Lively said that on the last patrol the Hard Heads weren’t even there. There was just a bunch of middle-aged ribbon-clerks from Tokyo or somewhere.”

“That also is what I’m worrying about. The Hard Heads are supposed to be there. We have to know where they are, or some midnight they will be in the middle of us here.”

The battery was available for general guard duty, dock detail, and perimeter duty. The perimeter ran up and along the crests, about ten miles back from the beach. And what Japanese were behind it were mostly content to stay behind it. But not entirely. They did make sorties, and they had to be kept track of. There was little daily contact between



the two forces along the perimeter itself. If the only trouble was that the two forces were not in agreement as to where the perimeter was supposed to be. There was constant infiltration, the nuisance of telephone lines being tapped or cut, and the chilly feeling that comes when all phones ring dead and the radio is out. The radio is always out.

So there were probing patrols, exploratory patrols, anticipatory patrols, just plain nuisance patrols in the middle of the night. The battery had to supply a patrol every third day, to last approximately half that interval.

They did well to travel at night. The terrible heat went down with the sun, and movement was bearable. They moved through the dark, covering the miles as well as they could through the tangles that were always at three levels.

“There is a reason for this,” said Lieutenant Littlejohn to Sergeant Rand. “There is a symbiosis of three factors all conspiring to bar our way: the ground grasses which are tendriled rather than trifoliate, the parasitic vines, and the free-standing boscage. Each offers its obstacle, and combined they make slow going...”

“That part’s all right,” said Rand, “but now we’re coming into new country for us. Here we aren’t sure of our topography.”

“Oh, but I have been here often. I know the topography, and especially I know the botany.”

“This far through the draw? But this was considered as beyond the perimeter till the last forty-eight hours. Well, if you can make it, then all of us can make it.”

There are men who do not know where it begins. But they would not be too successful here. There is always a definite point of starting. A man should be able to hear the whistle that begins the game, or the bell that starts the round. He should know when he is walking on the sand of an arena and no longer on a street. They were on an arena now, and most of them knew when they had entered it. It was about two-thirty in the morning. It would be hard to define the change, but it was definite, this point where the area of conflict began.

“There’s a glow up front,” said Corporal Mueller. “Shall I scout it?”

“No need,” said the lieutenant. “It’s only fox fire, phosphorescent glow from rotting wood.”

“It may, and it may not be. I’ve been in the jungle a lot at night. I say it

could be anything.”

“Too green. Not an artificial light at all. Simply fox fire.”

“Lieutenant, it could be a smoked-up carbide lantern. They show green. it could be an electric spot with a lurcher’s shield on it to make it a dark lantern. It could be a spot hung with netting, or even with one of their green fatigue jackets.”

Corporal Mueller scouted it. Mueller walked like a bear, plantigrade, and he rolled like a boat. But he could move more quickly than any other man of them, large or small; and he could get to places that none of the rest could reach. A bear can go where even a puma cannot. He will grumble and talk to himself and make a fuss over it, as a puma would disdain to do. But he will go there and back.

But it was only fox fire, half an acre of it, a cup-shaped swamp of early submerged rotting wood glowing in the jungles.

They lay up about two hours before daylight. There were eighteen of them: Lieutenant Littlejohn, Sergeant Rand, Corporals Mueller and Meadows. PFCs Hebert, Brooks, Pop Parker, Redwolf, Martin, and Gagnon; and privates Bellar, Girones, Mufios, Villareal, Cross, Jennings, Crawford, and Crandall. They slept for two hours before daylight, with Meadows, Redwolf, and Bellar as guards.

Then they roused, had J rations, and moved along their route. There is little twilight in the tropics. It is dark, and then within fifteen minutes it is broad daylight. And the sun is the enemy.

They went in three groups of six men each. Lieutenant Littlejohn took one with Corporal Meadows as his assistant. Corporal Mueller took one. And Sergeant Rand took one. Every two or three hours they would rendezvous and rest for half an hour,

“There is something moving up that ravine,” said Sergeant Rand at one of their rendezvous points, “less than a mile from here. The birds are rising above someone.”

“It’s likely wild pigs,” said Mueller.

“Birds do not rise for pigs,” said Rand. “They rise for some of the large predatory animals, of which there are none on Guinea. They rise from birds of other factions. And they rise from a man or men. These are rising from men below them. Who can spot one?”

“Heavens,” said Lieutenant Littlejohn. “Give me the field glasses. I believe I see him.”

“Heavens,” said Meadows very softly to himself. But he gave the field glasses to Lieutenant Littlejohn.

“Do you see them?” asked Rand.

“One, yes. I see him clearly. And he is a beauty.”

Meadows and Mueller looked at each other in disgust.

“Well, can you tell what he is?” asked Sergeant Rand. “Let me look. It’s important.”

“Of course it’s important,” said the lieutenant. “It will shake ornithology to its roots.”

“It will what?” asked Rand. The day had become blindingly hot. There is an insanity about very hot days. “Tell us at once whether he is Japanese, Melanesian, or Malay. Or let one of us look. We can tell in an instant.”

“Japanese or Melanesian? What an odd term of reference! It almost seems that we are not talking about the same thing. But he is a new species entirely. I had heard the ‘caw’ before, and had found one feather. And now I have seen him himself.”

Sergeant Rand took the field glasses roughly away from the Lieutenant.

“It’s too late,” said Corporal Meadows. “The man has already gone over the crest. And we still don’t know what he was. But he has seen us.”

“Lieutenant,” said Rand, “will you please tell us just what you were looking it?”

“The crow. A completely new species. Do you realize what this means?”

“Yes, Lieutenant,” said Rand wearily. “It will shake ornithology to its roots. And when you have shaken it, what will you have? The man! The man, Lieutenant, was he Japanese, Malay, or Melanesian?”

“Man? Was there a man there? Probably a patrolman of our counterparts, or a straggler of some description. But the crow! A completely new species!”

“Judas Priest!” said Meadows.

Rand, Meadows, and Mueller talked a little apart from the lieutenant and from the men. It was very hot now, and all the heat was not from the sun.

“What we do with the little joker if we get in a jam?” asked Meadows.

“I will be responsible,” said Rand. “If it reaches a point of necessity, I

will do whatever has to be done. You are with me if that happens?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Then the men will be with me also. I have the scent of something. I believe that the Hard Heads are back. It’s been too quiet today. There is nowhere so quiet as the mouth of a trap. I feel that there is more than one pair of eyeballs watching us. See if you can spot them.”

“Lieutenant,” said Sargeant Rand a little later, “we will not split up this time. We will go all eighteen together.”

“You are giving the orders now?” asked the Lieutenant with what was supposed to be ice in his voice. But the ice had a certain rattle and tinkle to it.

“I seem to be,” said Rand. “Someone has to give orders. We are under surveillance. We will travel together for greater security if we are caught in the bag.”

“Suppose that I countermand your order?”

“Would you give an opposite order, knowing it to be foolish, just to assert your authority?”

“No. No. The order is correct. It is just that I should have given it. But I will not give the order to scatter again.”

The lieutenant didn’t know what was wrong, but he knew that he had lost the argument. He should have been giving the orders and giving the right orders. And instead, he had been daydreaming and giving no orders at all.

But his resolve, and he made one, didn’t last long. At the next check he turned up missing, and Corporal Meadows had to go back for him. Meadows found Littlejohn sitting on a rock and sketching plants like a small boy. He caught him by a handful of jacket and jerked him to his feet.

“That’s enough,” said Lieutenant Littlejohn. “I am a commissioned officer. Lower your hand or you will be sorry for it.”

Corporal Meadows was breathing hard. It was a hot day and this perversity wore him thin. With the heat he couldn’t strive, and this thing here was almost as intangible.

“If you were only a man, I could hit you. But I don’t know what you are. I can’t hit you.”

“Whether I am or not we may find out today,” said the lieutenant. “I

half wish you had tried it. It may be that I would have surprised you.”

“Nothing you could do would surprise me now. But you couldn’t surprise me in that way. I have fifty pounds on you, and I have the name of being rough.”

“Several of you have the name for it,” said the Lieutenant.

“And several of us are,” are Meadows. They caught up with the others.

“Lieutenant,” said Sergeant Rand in a low but savage voice. “You will start to grow up right now. You are a drag on us. I cannot have you acting like a four year old.”

“You are right,” said Littlejohn, “and it’s an ugly habit of yours. But it may be that some others here could stand a little growing up.”

“You could even help a little,” said Corporal Mueller. “We believe that we are in the middle of a trap and that any move may release the trigger. But we have to spot them, the outline of them, before we cut loose. We haven’t really come on a thing, only the smell of a trap.”

“Oh,” said the lieutenant. He remembered something but he didn’t remember it clearly enough. “I did see a foreign movement several times, but I saw it with only a part of my mind. I was otherwise preoccupied.”

“Then for God’s sake, see it again! Spot them!”

“Did you ever know anyone to act like that?” Meadows asked Rand a little later.

“Yes, many. You on your first patrol, for one, Meadows. You were pretty scatterbrained. I may have been so on mine.”

3

They sank down in a clump on the edge of a clearing and remained very quiet for a while. But there was a nightmare aspect about the site as though the brush and thickets were alive and watching them.

Ahead was a flat green-purple meadow.

“I’d like to forget it all,” said Rand. “I’d lie clown there in the meadow and just sleep. But it’s probably full of thorns.”

“No. No,” said the Lieutenant. “How could there be thorns? Whoever heard of Marsilia with thorns? That is the largest area of Marsilia Vogelkopiensis that I have ever seen. The inconvenience of lying down there would not be thorns.”

“Lieutenant,” said Corporal Meadows, “I warned you to forget this science and nature jazz till we’re off patrol. Don’t make us do anything that we’ll regret.”

“But don’t you realize what it is? A fair sized field of quite rare Marsilia. And the feature of this Marsilia is that its Sporophyte is not truly aquatic.”

“Do tell,” said Meadows.

“Instead, the spore apparently moves by slow drift through a morasmal aggregate.”

“Heavens,” said Meadows.

There comes a time in those afternoons when no one is at his best. The breeze dies entirely, and the temperature here in these dead draws will go past a hundred and twenty. There are blind pockets in the air, and a bird will fly in and will not fly out. The atmosphere piles up in shimmering layers that confuse the vision and falsify distance, and the hills seem to roll and rise like green waves. The eyes burn and blur, and there is an angry threat in every tree.

“I have the sudden feeling,” said the Lieutenant, “of a groundbird who has not been paying attention, who looks up and sees the bullsnake poised for the swallow.”

“Am I the snake?” asked Meadows.

“You? No. How could you be the snake? This snake is a hundred yards long and we’re right in the middle of his coils. It is a centicephalon, a hundred-headed snake. It prickles my hair a little.”

The brush and the thickets were in fact alive and watching them. An ambush has a hundred eyes, and to be found in the middle of one calls up a world of anger and frustration and sudden fear. Watch out for the man who says he doesn’t scare. He will scare when he sees the eyes of an ambush.

“This chills me too,” said Corporal Mueller. “Were we all blind at once? There is one of them. Redwolf, see that form behind the largest kapok tree in that group. He is yours when we start blazing. And there is another. They’re all along the far edge of the clearing and are filling in. And they’re edging around. But whatever we do, don’t let’s panic. How about it, Rand? Shall we slip out before it’s sprung?”

“Yes. Slip out. Crawl out. Just plain break out. Get out somehow. But the worst advice that a man in danger can ever follow is not to panic, It is even thought of as somehow noble not to panic. But an old captain used to tell me that there was a proper time for everything, including panic. A rabbit knows that. A deer knows it, and he’s not even very smart. Why

does a man try to forget it? This is the time for a little judicious panic. Go as quietly as we can, at first, fellows, right back the way we came, and then down the first draw to the right. Crawl like snakes, men, and then run like horses. We will rendezvous at Blind Creek Point four miles down. Most of us should make it. And we have found out what we came to find Out, The Hard Heads are back, and in number. Now move, men.”

“Just a minute,” said an unfamiliar voice. “I will give the orders here.” Or was it a familiar voice with an unfamiliar ring to it?

“Who said that?”

“I said that. And I will be obeyed. Are you not accustomed to taking orders from an officer?” asked Lieutenant Littlejohn.

“The Lieutenant will be obeyed,” said Sergeant Rand. “And what are the Lieutenant’s orders on this?”

“First we will trigger off the action with an apparently casual shot. And then we will retreat, but not back the way we came. We will run very low down this gully here on the edge of the Marsilia complex. And we will gather in a pocket on the other end. There appears to be very good cover there. And three men, Mueller, Redwolf, and Cross, will hold this end till we are all down. It’s narrow and crested here, and three men can hold it for a while. And, once we are in the pocket, they will have to come to us, and singly, or a few at a time. The gully is narrow. And it is bound to have a back door.”

“But, Lieutenant, that’s two hundred yards. And it’s only crawl cover. They’ll shoot us like turkeys as we go down. And what’s the use of holding one end of the gully when the entire length of it would be open to them?”

“But how would it be open to them? How would they get at it?”

“Are you crazy, Lieutenant? They’d cross that clearing in fifteen seconds and have us head on.”

“The clearing? But that’s the Marsilia. They surely wouldn’t venture to cross that.”

“Lieutenant, you’re in a child’s world. I’m sure the Hard Heads will not respect the Marsilia, as you call it.”

“Then this is better than I hoped,” said the Lieutenant. “If you don’t understand, then maybe they won’t either. I read a warning once about over-estimating an enemy. It makes for timidity, Now, if you are ready, men, I will give the order.”

“How about it, Rand?” asked Meadows. “We are looking to you.”

“Do you know what you’re doing, Lieutenant Littlejohn?” Rand asked.

“Yes, I know what I’m doing.”

“The Lieutenant will be obeyed,” said Sergeant Rand.

“I have just looked into my coffin,” said Pop Parker. “I hadn’t particularly wanted a dirt one, but it looks as though I will get it.”

“The beauty of the dirt ones is that they will fit anyone,” said Pvt. Crawford. “And there are always enough to go around. But we will soon fill up eighteen.”

“I only knew one man who seriously claimed to be afraid of nothing,” said Sergeant Rand. “But the peculiar thing is that he was afraid to die when the time came. He’s the only one I ever remember who was afraid to die when it came down to it. A man usually isn’t afraid of death when it comes really near. But he’s embarrassed over it. It’s an awkward and unaccountable thing. And it cannot meet your eye when it comes. It’s a shuffling skulker. But it’s no great thing to die. Anyone can do it. The defeating thing is to have to do it needlessly.”

“And tell her not to wait for me “ For I’m not coming home,” sang PFC Jennings softly.

“The order will be the rifle shot of PFC Redwolf,” said the Lieutenant. “Corporal Mueller has already given him his target. Have you still your eye on your man? Then aim quickly and fire. Now move, men, move. And don’t worry about a thing.”

Redwolf killed the Hard Head behind the kapok tree with a good shot, and then things began to pop. The old devil was unchained and all sorts of things began to come out of the pit.

Mueller, Redwolf, and Cross hunched down behind the crest, and the remaining patrolmen crawled and stumbled and ran low, down the gully. Mueller and his two men could probably have held the end of the gully for several minutes, except that they would be out-flanked in a matter of seconds.

For the trigger had set the whole jungle into motion. The hills rose like green waves, and the earth burst open. The jungle-line ejected more than a hundred of the enemy, green-brown men, moving like sure animals. No ribbon clerks these. They were the old Hard Heads, the killer soldiers who struck like a giant rat pack, all musk-animals, meaner than men, sharp pack-running killers.



And, as the fifteen patrolmen stumbled down the gully, those Hard Heads charged at them with a loose crackle of fire, came across that green-purple meadow rapidly, more than a hundred of them with less than seventy-five yards to go. Not over ten seconds for it. They came in a black rush like the teeth of one great cutter blade. They came light and fast. And then, somehow, heavy and fast.

They charged to take the fifteen men strung out single, crawling on their bellies down the narrow ditch. Fifteen men with not over fifteen inches of cover, and no firing room at all. Sitting ducks. Lying down ducks. Plain dead ducks.

“Somehow I never intended to die on my belly like a snake,” said Meadows. He was nicked, and he watched a spate of red and black blood mix with the green hot mud in a pattern that was also a premonition. He wasn't nicked badly, but then he hadn't raised up very high. He had always hated to crawl on his belly.

The last seconds of one's life tick off loudly and with finality. Two. Four. But slowly now as though the hands of the clock were mired. The attackers were half-way across, a black-green row of them that filled exactly half the world.

Five. Six. These may have been the longest seconds ever. They were unnaturally long. They were grisly, hot, weird, seconds.

Time itself had slowed down.

Then it stopped completely.

The Hard Heads stumbled heavy-footed. They were a study in slow motion. These death-bringers worked it out with horrible delay. It was eerie that the last scene in life should be run in slow motion. There was something obscene about it.

The Hard Heads wallowed, floundered, and panicked.

And they began to go down.

It is incredible the way a little mud can swallow a man, or a clutch of men. The heat was now unbearable, and again not all of it came from the sun. The piled-up air shimmered and shattered the vision. It is possible that this was all a mistake of blurred sight and that the impossible thing was not happening at all. The earth does not commonly devour a group of men like that.

And yet, in the blinding heat and the wavering air, it seemed to do so. If those Hard Heads weren't sinking out of sight in the mud, it was a very

nightmarish sort of mirage.

“I saw a cow go down once,” said Pop Parker. The way he said it, it was the most profound statement in the world.

But they didn’t make too much fuss about dying, those hundred Hard Heads. A little protest, a little argument. Yet mud is very unsatisfactory to argue with. A little screaming and chatter, that was all.

It was the eighteen men who watched it who felt a sense of sickness and shock. It was like the shock of the small boy who, for the first time, sees the bull-snake begin to swallow that ground bird.

“I always said I’d never do it,” said that tough Cajun Hebert. “I’ve never been sick before in my life, but now I’ve just brought it up green.”

“Santa Maria, Madre di Dios —,” said Private Girones.

“— ruego per nosotros pecadores —,” said Private Munas.

“— ahora y en la ore de nuestra muerte,” said Private Villareal.

After the Hard Heads were chest-deep and really frightened, it seemed that the pressure made it impossible for them to scream loudly. But they knew that they were being buried alive and that the hot sky was inexorable. And the eighteen patrollers watched the enemy disappear with plain horror.

“If it would rain,” said Crandall, “it wouldn’t be so hot. And it wouldn’t seem so bad.” Why had he said such a silly thing as that?

His mind was in a state of shock and his stomach was tied in green knots. But they all of them spoke inanities when they spoke.

In three minutes, there was no sign of the Hard Heads. More than a hundred of them had gone down there, and the Marsilia had already begun to sew up its wounds, oozing its clover-leafed foliage again over the greenish sand.

“I will never love it again,” said the Lieutenant. “It is really a sacophag, a flesh-eating plant. But it’s quite bland to look at. It is hard to believe that its enticement is intentional.”

“Lieutenant,” said Sergeant Rand after a decent period of silence, “did you know that that was quicksand?”

“Sergeant, get the men started back. Some of them may be a little queasy after what they have seen, and I believe that they should have some movement to settle them down. We can be at Blind Creek Point in an hour and a half. They can take the last of their rations then and rest till sundown. Then we will move them again, and should be in our own

bivouac area by midnight. Now move them, Sergeant, and waste no time about it.”

“Yes, sir.”

But, when they were resting at Blind Creek Point, the Sergeant asked again.

“Lieutenant, did you know that that was quicksand?”

“Certainly. Didn’t you? I explained that the *Marsilia Vogelkopiensis* invariably has a morasmal underlay.”

“Yes, sir. So you did. I wasn’t paying attention.”

Lieutenant Littlejohn was sketching again as they waited for the sun to go down. He was sketching a crow in the sky. But now, strangely, it was not a boyish hand that showed in the sketch. The strokes had boldness and force to them that they had lacked before. It was the hand of a sure and canny man that drew that stark crow in the sky.

## ONE-EYED MOCKING-BIRD

Tobias Lamb, though not well liked, was held in high esteem by the scientific community. There were many of us who hardly liked him because — well, it was because his tricks and illusions sometimes shattered us completely. “And besides,” Alwin Garvie said of him, “he’s in unlikely man.”

Ah well, admit it, we were afraid of him. He was a harsh mocker; and yet he had a pleasant strain (or it was meant to be pleasant) in him. He was a hard driver. If he didn’t actually hold a whip in his hand when he was working on a project, there was always a whip in his voice. He was avid, even feverish, to drive a project to success; and yet he didn’t seem at all hungry for personal glory. When Paul Kradzesh stole the credit for the Crisley Communicator from him, we really feared for Kradzesh’s safety and life when Big Toby should react to being robbed of that glory. But Tobias Lamb didn’t react to it at all. Whether credit should redound to him or to another was less than nothing to Toby.

And now he was talking about the new project that had hold of him and of us all.

“The thing is to get a few nations accultured and thriving, and then to give the inventive tilt to them. And then we will let them invent. As we are looking for rapid invention, we will put a time limit on their inventiveness; the time it takes a rifle bullet to go four kilometers. In fact, I’ll put one of the nations inside a rifle bullet here and shoot it off.”

“What in the world for?” Francie Jack asked. She had always made an effort to understand Big Toby, but she hadn’t understood him any better than had the rest of us.

“Toby, you have a bad case of anthropomorphism, of putting things into human terms and analogies,” Lucius Cockburn chided the big lout Toby. “Nations that can only barely be guessed at with an electronic microscope are not true nations.”

“If they are made up of thousands of individuals of a kindred, and if they are able to live, elect, and proclaim a destiny, then they are nations,” Toby insisted. “What for, Francie? For a test and an experiment and an opportunity. I will really be shooting at that mocking-bird singing so imperfectly on that bough. But whether I miss or hit the bird, the rifle bullet will still crash into that rock cliff four kilometers across the valley,

and it will destroy itself and the small nation that I will have put inside it. It will do this unless the individuals of that nation shall wake to consciousness, form local governments, expand to a limited -universal government, develop science and technology, form groups of empowered geniuses to apply that science and technology, learn to navigate the bullet, avoid destruction against the cliff; and return it here in quest of their origin, all within two and a half seconds of time. I have not set it an impossible task. It is a short-aeon nation made up of miniaturized intelligences, and the concept of delay would not be possible to it.”

“The ‘Reacting Jelly’ does react amazingly fast sometimes,” Paul Kradzesh admitted, “and most times it does not react at all. We have the package to perform miracles. We have the activator to go into the package. But it performs irregularly and randomly. We must induce uniformity. And, Toby, it is silly to refer to a supersmall glob as a nation.”

“No, it is a sanity which in present company seems to be limited to myself,” Big Tobias Lamb said stubbornly. This harsh and clumsy man was held in puzzled esteem by the scientific community. He was admitted, yes, and there were even some persons who tried to like him. But did he conform to Elton Cabot’s dictum of the ideal scientist? —

‘Serene, handsome with inner and outer perfection, into every field of the mind, something of a poet, totally cultured, completely free of hokum, very much of the philosopher, everything of the humanist.’

It seemed that most of those were things that Toby Lamb was not.

But Big Toby, physically powerful and exceptionally ugly, loutish and impossible, completely ambiguous in his own group; he was a cult hero of several other groups, though it puzzled us how those culties ever even heard of him.

Toby made noises, it was too much to call it music. He made these sounds on supposed reproductions of very ancient instruments, according to probably faulty interpretations of ancient musical notations. He made these noises on clanging iron ‘harps’ and on howling flutes. And persons of the ‘rattling rock’ sort had intruded audio pickups into Toby’s big studios and they had turned his sounds into cult things. A clanging, always a clanging, that was the ‘Toby Sound’.

It was so typical of him that, in his loud talking, when he banged his palms together for emphasis, he did not make the ‘clap’ sound that other persons make. He had a ‘clang’.

And Big Toby painted strong and grotesque pictures. Perhaps 'painted' is the wrong word since it is not known how he achieved them; but he 'effected' powerful and vulgar and disturbing pictures. He called them his 'Cainite Space Ship' series. They were wrenching and a little bit distasteful, but they were also funny.

"You are a mocker," Lucius Cockburn told Toby often.

"Oh certainly. There are all too few of us. What we want are mockers who at the same time have total faith. I want that in the director of every project and every public board and government. And I want it in the short-aeon inventive realms and in the miniaturized intelligences that make them up. But deliver us from the mocker who sings too sweetly."

Tobias Lamb had other activities which, in any other man, would seem to contribute to Elton Cabot's dictum of the ideal scientist. Well yes, he was 'into every field of the mind'; in that much he conformed to it. But how clumsily he was into many of those fields! He wrote several books. But his New Physics for the Middle-School Children was not well accepted. It was forced off the market. He seemed to be teaching physics by means of a hairy sort of mythology. Even his mathematics was more myth than math. And his Not For Everybody Book, well, it was not for everybody.

But now Big Toby was teasing an invisible glob of activated molecular syndrome into a microscopic hole drilled into the lead-shot part of a rifle bullet. He used a complicated microscope with a variety of eye-pieces impinging on his eyes; and he fingered a keyboard that created and controlled finger-shaped electrical fields to nudge the small glob into the hole and settle it there.

"Principality and Nation, in you go!" Big Toby spoke to the little glob that was quite a few orders below bare-eye visibility. "Your history and your destiny begin right now. This is the first instant of your Heroic Age. Be Heroic then, which is the same thing as being inventive."

"Why all the attention to that particular smudge that you are putting into a place difficult to study?" Alwin Garvie asked. "Should not all of the smudges have equal attention?"

"You folks talk to the other smudges," Toby said. "I'll talk to this one."

"Well, Creager over at the 'Evolvate Science Conglomerate' does talk with much success to his reactive molecular jelly," Paul Kradzesh admitted, "but I don't believe that he tells it such fairy tales as you tell



seconds, if in fact they do learn to navigate in time to bring the bullet back at all. Oh, we had a better start than they have, but we may not have had as good an inclination and indoctrination. We already had a city established on Earth, no mean city; so we had come a respectable ways in corporate organization. We had metallurgy. We had been working bronze and iron for a full generation. A dozen of us shot ourselves off, half accidentally and half on purpose, in a sealed sphere.”

“You were there some eight thousand years ago, Toby?” Francie Jack asked.

“I say ‘we’, for I have a racial memory of it. All of you were born yesterday. I was born several days before yesterday. But we had to learn a lot: to orient ourselves in space, to develop a propulsion power from nothing while traveling at something more than escape velocity in cramped quarters in the dark. We had to develop from less than nothing a purpose and a philosophy, and a navigation to return to earth, and to soft-land on earth. That latter was very difficult for us, as it will be for what Alwin calls the ‘wee realm’ that I am putting into this rifle bullet here. Had the thing been done by any other than my own family I would call the whole thing impossible.”

“Who was running your space ship, Toby?” Alwin Garvie asked. “Who were the tyrants who made it work?”

“Two brothers, Jabelcain and Jubelcain. And their half-brother Tubalcain. Our very take-off from Earth was an hysterical and amazing feat of invention, but it was necessary for our survival. Oh, our intelligence gathering system was good. We knew where the Earth-faults in our neighborhood were. We knew which one would blow with the most power, when the fountains of the deep should burst open, and we beheved that if we set our bronze sphere as a cork in the throat of that erupting fountain, we could be blown clear off Earth. The wee folks in this bullet have an easier task here. They don’t have an intelligence system sufficient to know when next a rifle will be shooting off in this part of town, nor the means to get there and set themselves in the chamber of that rifle by themselves. I do this for them.

“But we, in the old days, had to go. If we’d stayed, we’d have drowned. And in that case we would not have had such future progeny as myself, a heavy loss.”

“Oh what stuff, Toby, what stuff!” Viola Rafter admired. “That is the



sort of stuff you tell to the small chemical smudges to motivate them, is it? That is something like the stuff I tell to my own house plants to motivate them; but I don't do it nearly as well as you do. Is some larger person telling you this to motivate you for something?"

"Yes, somebody larger tells me such narrations now and then. Yes, to motivate me, I suppose, as I motivate the small molecular smudges. And I do find myself curiously motivated now and then, and especially now."

Tobias Lamb had now scaled the sub-microscopic 'realm' into the rifle bullet and had put the bullet into the chamber of the rifle.

"I never heard that legend before, Toby," Lucius said. "I have met the myth that either Gog or Magog rode astraddle of the roof-ridge of the ark for the whole trying time of the flood and so prevented the old race of giants from being entirely wiped out. So we have half-giants in the world even now. But that the descendents of Cain escaped Earth in a space-ark, that is new to me. I believe that it's cheating."

"No, not cheating, not cheating at all. To have taken the gamble with the odds a billion to one against, that is not cheating. To suppose that we of the left-handed fraternity, of the goatish rather than the sheepish brotherhood, had no purpose, that is unreal. We of the line of Cain, we who lost our innocence for the second time, we who ate of the horrible tree of knowledge for the second time, there must have been a reason for us. We were the only early inventors, you know. Genesis 4, 20-22 gives only the barest hints of our inventions, but they were the only human inventions in their time."

"When did the Cainite Space-Ark return to the Earth, Toby?" Lucitis asked with a failed smirk.

"I don't know. Within the last several hundred years. When invention returned to the Earth, that was the space-ark homing back."

"What stuff you must have in your unconscious, Toby!" Francie said. "You're sheer mythic. And it's said that, in the circuit of re-entrant thought and style and mentation, the mythic meets again with the subatomic and the atomic and the molecular on the field of small aeonics. They'd make no sense else, its said. They make no sense as it is, I say. But our other smudges of reaching molecular jolly are not reacting at all today in the perfect conditions we have set up. We do not know what your own 'realm' is doing in the conditions you have set up, but ours do not move."

“They do not move because you do not move them, because you do not motivate them,” Tobias said. “You can’t motivate them, except accidentally, because you don’t believe them to be alive and subject to motivation. But there is not any such thing as inanimate matter. The smallest sub-atomic particle is alive and at least partly conscious, and at least partly thinking. If you do not believe this, pretend that you believe it at least. You’ll get better results that way.”

Then Tobias Lamb raised the rifle to shoulder and eye, slid off the safety, sighted with the gun, and crooked his finger around the trigger.

“What are you really going to do, Toby?” Francie Jack asked with apprehension in her voice. “You’re acting very strange, even for you. You’re up to something, Toby. You’re up to something tricky!”

“The minor thing I’m going to do, on either the first or second fly-by, is plug that mockingbird that is too saccharine to mock. And the main thing I’m going to do is set a living realm in the position where it must invent or perish. I’m betting it will invent.”

Tobias Lamb shot the rifle then. And, after an interval that seemed about two and a half or three seconds, the rifle shot Tobias Lamb. It shot him in the right eye and clear through his head. It killed him too.

Tobias Lamb was dead standing up. He was so stocky and solid that he did not fall. He did not even lower the rifle. He was in a cataleptic rigidity. he had no breath and heartbeat. The shot had entered his right eye and had exited massively from the back of his head.

He still had his big grin, more grotesque than ever, almost more life-like than ever.

“This is not real, this is not real. This is something happening out of time,” Francie lack spoke as if in a daze.

“What is that misfit bird-song?” Alwin Garvie asked in inconsequential amazement. “The mockery of it, tile arrogance of it! That at least, is real.”

“The coroner will decide what is real,” Paul Kradzesh stated heavily. “And here he is now. I never saw a call answered so fast. It’s almost impossible.”

The coroner was busying himself about the standing dead man, going through what seemed like a burlesque routine.

“Oh, he is rigid in death,” the coroner said then. “He’s dead standing up, and he rigidified so swiftly and he is so well balanced that he did not

fall. Ah, he still has his finger on the gun trigger. Don't stand in front of it. It's a rare happening, and yet I've seen it twice before in my practice."

"You lie," said dead man Tobias Lamb in a pleasanter voice than usual. "Such a thing never happened before. It didn't happen this time either. Oh, don't look so angry and repelled, good friends. Did you want me dead? You really don't understand the possibilities and paradozed that are present in the context of 'unelapsd time'? It's a property of very small realms and societies. It's a bonus that almost dwarfs the rest of it. Oh, how howlingly valuable it will be to us!"

"We do not like you, Tobias!" Paul Kradzesh swore savagely. "We do not like you because of tricks like this. But it did happen! And the coroner was here."

"And he is not here now," Toby Lamb laughed. "You cannot say properly 'He was here' because there are no tenses in unelapsd time. Nor will I assure you that my death is an illusion. It is a valid event in uilelapsd time, that first remarkable fall-out of the miniature space flight and return.

"No, of course I'm not all right, Francie. I have a shiner. The soft landing of the returning bullet-space-ship was not all that soft. It blacked my eye."

"I hate you, Toby," Paul said tightly. "Why did you do such a thing as that?"

"For the joy of discovery, for dramatic of fect, for open fun, and to perform a valid experiment. All, that bird-song! it's near perfect now! The inimitable mockery and arrogance of it! And the burning belief! A little discipline in its life was all that bird needed. Aye, get at glob of irony in its song! Mock, bird, mock! And believe at the same time. A one-eyed bird had better be a true believer around here!"

The mockingbird, still singing on its branch outside, had lost an eye to the fly-by either coming or going. But it had a new song that you had to respect whether you liked it or not.

"The reactive jelly, as you so ignorantly call it, will react astonishingly now," Big Toby said. "It has become a nation of constimate atomic-speed invention. Set it any problem and it will solve it. The ramifications of all this, they are endless."

"We do hate you, Toby," Lucius Cockburn growled.

"Oh sure, oh sure. Whether the little nation did those space marvels or

not, it is absolutely essential that it believes it did them. Its motivation lies in its high history.”

“We can’t accept knowing that even the dust is inventive,” Francie Jack said sadly, “but we’ll profit from it. We have the perfect activator now. But it will take a new sort of people to accept it fully. Some day you may have them.”

“Some day, today, almost immediately,” Tobias Lamb gloated. “Oh, the most promising students for it can be selected with no time elapsed at all. I’ve already put a realm to work on that, and the selection is already waiting for me.”

Those students who are now developing best ways to motivate and mythologize sub-microscopic smears to get maximum performance and invention from them are an odd lot. They have to be, for they are working with small, left-handed orders that are more goatish than sheepish, that are very near to the grotesque heart of matter. And some of those students had a hop on the subject, those who had read Tobias Lamb’s *New Physics for Middle-School Children* and had been enchanted by it.

They have accumulated and analyzed a frightening amount of dream material from molecular-level and smaller entities, and the dream material in those little worlds is absolutely grotesque. And the mythic configurations can not even be conceived of in the geometry of human myth. They are quite otherwise.

Those brilliant, odd-lot students have their own cultus and fraternity now, and their token and mascot is the One-Eyed Mocking-Bird.

Oh Whatta You Do When the Well Runs Dry?

The deep well of unconscious cerebration.

- Henry James

For you never miss the water till the well runs dry.

- Rowland Howard

The well ran dry on November 7, 1999 (a Sunday). And when that well ran dry, then everything that mattered came to a halt. It took a few hours for the multitude to realize that it had all stopped. A few of the smart ones knew it almost at once, and a smaller few knew that nobody could be very smart again under the new conditions.

Miss Phosphor McCabe woke up very early on the morning of November 8.

“I never felt so empty-headed in my life,” she told herself. “Usually I

have all kinds of things going on up there. Most times my head is as busy as three airports. Something's gone wrong. Fortunately I have friends who'll know what to do."

You remember Miss Phosphor McCabe. She lives in that big pink pagoda on that hill on the north edge of town, and she has lots of unusual friends.

"Now I know what's happened." Miss Phosphor said. "The well's gone dry. I better get some of my friends to see what can be done about it."

She got hold of a couple of her friends and told them about the well.

"Yeah, we know," the special friends said. "We'll give them a little while yet."

Clear dry, was the well? There was none of the sparkle water left anywhere? Oh, there were little bits of it in isolated pockets here and there, but there was an impediment to its use. In the isolated pockets the water was no longer moving; and so it lost its sparkle. When it did not move or sparkle it could not be received or enjoyed as extraordinary water. It was ordinary now and it couldn't satisfy the thirst for the extraordinary.

(This is metaphor, yes.) What had dried up was not a well or pool or ocean of physical water. What had dried up was wit, and artistry, and congruence, and enjoyment, and the sparkle of the spirit. What had dried up was creativity in every form; and could the calling of all the committees in the world bring it back? Several self-constituted committees had assembled very early to see what could be done. The problem was to rekindle the wit of the world and get it to flowing again (This is mixed metaphor, yes.)

The problem might be quite urgent. Will a witless world die immediately? Or will it (worse case, perhaps) continue on a witless way for aeons?

The world had waked up witless on the afternoon of November 8 (afternoon by artificial universal world time). Oh, some people had gone to bed witless and distraught. Some people had felt the assault of witlessness in their sleep. And there were some people who still rose in the mornings instead of in the afternoons. But it was afternoon when most of the world woke witless and with the sense of having lost something.

"It is no good saying that we knew it would happen," the great

cosmologist Norbert Hsu mumbled. “We didn’t. Oh several of us predicted it, but we all had the strong inner feeling that it could never happen. After all. this is the well that had never run dry since the beginning of life on Earth. Ah, Irene, you look dowdy today, and that’s another thing that we all could never happen.”

Irene Komohana hissed with the intake of her breath. She had been regarded as the most stylish woman in the world, but she didn’t resent Norbert’s in-passing statement that she was dowdy now. She knew that it was true. Seven persons had come together (this was in an un-pink building on the south edge of town), by natural reaction, from several parts of the world, within two hours of the drying of the well. These seven persons had a natural affinity for each other. They were (or perhaps now it was “they had been”) the awarest of the aware. They had always been the first ones to know things, and they were surely among the first persons on Earth to realize that the well had run dry. These seven had been as smart as any people you will find anywhere, and already they realized that neither they nor any others were going to be very smart in the new case. Norbert Hsu, Carlos Liosa, Agnes Belka, Edwin Senate, Irene Komohana, Sedgewick Dollo and Johua Santa Cruz were the once talented seven: but were they talented now? Had all talent necessarily dried up? “What has dried up is the ‘Idea Well,’” Carlos Liosa, the great public servant, said: and they all groaned at the phrase. The “Idea Well,” what a rosy-posy name! Be assured that none of them would have named it anything as banal as the “Idea Well” if they hadn’t suddenly found themselves in the post-idea state. “What we must do is treat it like any other well that runs dry,” Carlos plowed ahead without a trace of any idea in his skull. “Maybe we will give it a little acid treatment as is given to oil wells when they fall off their flow. Or we will set guns down in its depth and perforate its formations. We might put it under saltwater pressure and hope for some response. Or we locate and cement its leakages as well-men sometimes do with water wells. We set in barriers, or we break out barriers, to let ground water or rogue streams flow into it. We calculate its accretion and its depletion, and we compel the second to be less than the first. And the well may recover... a little bit... sometime.” “But this well offers a difficulty in that we don’t know where it is,” Agnes Belka pointed out. “We don’t know the physical location of this well: we do not even know whether it has physical existence.” “It’s true that we

have no idea how to locate it,” Joshua Santa Cruz agreed, “since all ideas dried up when the well dried up. We can’t do anything about it since what is lost is our ability to do anything about anything.”

“Maybe things will go on as they were and nobody will notice the difference,” Edwin Senate said.

“Yes, things will go on as they were,” Sedgewick Dollo agreed. “For a few hours, or even a couple of days they might go on. Things might continue on for about as long as fingernails continue to grow on a corpse.”

But there were little things cropping up all over the place to indicate that things wouldn’t go on quite as they had before. Fewer people were dying (that was noticed almost immediately), and nobody was dying spectacularly. Is dying, especially spectacular dying, a creative act? It seemed so. But about as many people were being born as before, though there didn’t seem to be quite as much meaning attached to the act. People were being born without accompanying prodigies, and without any premonition of coming greatness. The extraordinary had gone out of people, those already present and those arriving. For there was this other thing: if people weren’t dying as much, neither were they living as much.

“It just isn’t the same thing anymore,” folks were heard to say. It just really isn’t living anymore.”

Musicians couldn’t improvise. They had nothing left to improvise with. The art of creative lying came to an end. Profanity became tired: it became louder and more in use, but it was repetitious and unoriginal. Pornography similarly lost gusto and increased in stridency. Jokes died out, and intuitions died. Problem-solving was a lost talent. And the roily oil that had made the slide through life so much easier had now lost its slickness and turned into an abrasive.

The incredible creativity by which (and only by which) persons had managed to get along with each other at all was gone. There had used to be (just two days ago there had used to be) a super-creative person in every group, in every viable couple, at every human meeting, at each crossroads or confrontation of any kind. At least one third of the persons in the world had been super-creative in personal relations. If it hadn’t been so, then personal relations would have been impossible. Now the super-creativity was gone and personal relations had become a gruesome remnant.

Suicides and showboat deaths were down, but dumb accidents were up. It looked as if the death rate might soon adjust itself. The accidents, the accidents! It really takes quite a bit of creativity for even the most obscure person to live for a long span. The amorphous and ever present gray creature named “accident” is escaped only by the employment of creative wit. And when that weapon is no longer turned against it, the “accident” moves in, slowly but relentlessly, chomping.

Great multitudes of people were getting lost. They got lost on their way to work: they got lost on their way home. They could no longer recognize their proper houses. Some of them could no longer recognize their proper mates. After all, people do look pretty much alike. It takes a lot of native wit and a number of mnemonic tricks to be able to recognize one’s own wife or husband out of the mass of humanity. And native wit and mnemonics shriveled and died when no longer nourished by the strong and sparkling water. The whole systematic world was going to break down right away.

“We will give them a couple of days yet,” small groups of Forteans said to each other. Some of these Forteans were friends of Miss Phosphor McCabe, and others of them were unknown to her.)

“We will strictly ration the water from this special ocean-well,” Carlos Llosa said positively. “We will enforce a regulation that each person must deposit three liters in the pool for each two liters that he withdraws. I have information also that there is a small but constant, and natural and unhuman, flow into the well, and that it will soon give us a working pool again if we can halt the panic withdrawals. We will emphasize a ‘Don’t think! Thinking consumes substance from the collective unconscious’ campaign for a week or so. And, if we then have something to ration, we will ration it most strictly and without favoritism.”

This was the second day that the seven special persons of natural affinity had been holding their meeting. There wasn’t much left of their natural affinity now. And there wasn’t much left of their specialism.

“How can we ration it?” the great cosmologist Norbert Hsu demanded. “How can we force a person to disgorge into this well of the group unconscious? How can we limit what he will withdraw? We don’t even understand the mechanics of the dipping out of this well. Will we give a person a chit entitling him to withdraw so many bright ideas a week?”



“Yes, that is exactly what we will do!” Carlos declared. “Don’t laugh. It can be done. Any such thing is mere regulatory or administrative procedure.” (In his private life, Carlos Llosa was President of the United States, and he had been competent in the administrative procedure field.) “Any process or decision can be implemented, once it is set into its proper medium and context, and once enough creative imagination is brought to bear on its problem.”

“You are wrong, man, wrong, Joshua Santa Cruz contradicted him. “Perhaps it could be done, if the problem in question were anything else. Any process or decision can be implemented, except one. Surgeons are seldom successful in performing serious operations upon themselves. The hammer can shape and hammer out anything except itself. Enough imagination cannot be brought to bear upon this problem when the problem is that we have completely run out of imagination.”

“The well shouldn’t have failed so soon,” Edwin Senate argued. “We have been wasteful and prodigal of its substance for not much more than a hundred centuries. Oh, certainly we reaped what we did not sow, and we gathered where we did not scatter. But we have been contributing to that pool for hundreds of centuries, and our unhuman brothers had been doing so for thousands of centuries. It shouldn’t have gone dry yet.”

“Well, we had been consuming the capital at an extraordinary rate,” Joshua Santa Cruz remarked, “and at the same time we had reduced the numbers of unhuman contributors to less than a tenth. And if it isn’t empty then what is wrong with it?”

“I’ve never really believed in the Collective Unconscious as an ocean-well from which we dip all our ideas and inspirations,” that high stylist Irene Komohana protested. “I just don’t like the idea of drinking out of a well that every sort of creature pours into. It isn’t stylish. It’s revolting. It’s positively Fortean!”

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(“We will give them a little while yet,” the small groups of Forteans said to each other.)

The old theory about the “Collective Unconscious” seemed almost to be proved by its failing. This was the thesis that there was one undermind that was shared by all humans. Extremists said that it was also shared by all animals, mammals, birds, fishes, frogs, snakes, lizards, earthworms, bees, ants, crickets and midges. Further extremists said that

it was also shared by all plants from the trees of the forest to the grass of the fields to the seaweeds of the oceans. And others thought that it was shared by inanimate things, too, things that had been alive especially: wood, and vegetable loam, and limestone that had been built up by small deposited bodies. And the further-outs maintained that all the fire-rocks also contributed to it. And it was known that ghosts, familiar spirits and unarrived souls had once contributed greatly to the ocean-well.

This Collective Unconscious was a huge underground and trashy ocean or pool or cistern or well (all the terms apply to it). In it were all unborn and unthought things, and all quasi-existences and abominations. In it were the spent arrows that had once been shot upward but had not risen high enough to reach the light and so become thought. They had fallen back and shattered, but even in their dissolved forms they were still piercing shafts of ideas.

In the Collective Unconscious were the paradoxes of existence as propounded by toads, the rhapsodies of rotifers, and the streams-of-consciousness of sunfishes. There were the grotesque limbs of millions of creatures the rest of whom had not been created. There were the everted contents of dragons' stomachs and the everted and maldigested contents of countless minds.

The fruits of child labor, of the children of a thousand species, were thick in that stew. This was the grinding and horrible labor, ill paid and inefficient, going on always for endless hours, in pain and apprehension and fear. Here were the mephitic deliriums of the poor souls in Purgatory and the roaring insanities of the lost souls in Hell. Here was all the broken logic of the ghost nations, and the specious daydreams of the rotting dead.

It was a strange and astringent stew in the pool of the common unconscious, but it was one of the waters of life. It was the manure and the fertility from which all thoughts and ideas were formed. It was the raw material (oh, was it ever raw material!) from which all the sudden intuitions were put together, those winged notions that are called originality and creativity.

That huge and ungainly splashy darkness was a Ouija or planchette board that produced automatic thought as well as automatic writing. It was spook infested. It bubbled up, from the one blind well, into the billions of minds; and it was somehow instrumental in generating all

lively and consequential thoughts. And the detritus of those billions; of sharing minds fell back down into the well to add to its slurpy mass.

But, about a hundred centuries ago, one of the member species of this Collective Unconscious had begun to consume its substance at an uncommon rate. Those of this species became the lords who reaped where they had riot sowed and gathered where they had not planted. But there were many contributors to the substance of the harvest. How would one species run it dry?

Well, there had been many contributors, but now there were not near as many. When more and more trees and land plants and plankton plants of the sea (those whose business it is to supply oxygen for the world), when more and more of them are destroyed, then there is less and less usable oxygen for the world. And, following this analogy, when more and more of the contributing species to the subterranean pool are destroyed (wiped-out animals, extirpated ghost nations and airy nations and fire nations of beings, souls with their communication and rapport broken), when great numbers of such contributors reduced or destroyed, then there is less and less of the mysterious underground sparkling stuff, the substratum of cognition, to supply the active minds of the world. More is dipped out of the shaggy well than is put into it, so there would come a time when the well would go dry.

On November 7, 1990 (and on the several days that followed), the well made noises and produced symptoms that indicated that it had gone dry. The offending species was that of the prodigal human people, feverishly thinking and creating and originating, and it was they who had pumped the well dry.

Simple orientation was one of the things that had failed. Simple orientation had always been a complex and continuing syndrome of creative thoughts and acts. And creative thoughts and acts cannot continue unless they are nourished by the strong broth out of that paradoxical well. People who lose their simple orientation will not be able to perform even simple jobs, and they sure will not be able to perform complex tasks.

The breakdown was at hand: deprivation, suffering, starvation! The world was falling apart.

“Have you ever heard of a large city getting its water supply through huge pipes and conduits and not knowing whence those pipes lead, not

knowing the location of the lake or reservoir or source that they are tapping?” This was Joshua Santa Cruz giving the doleful appraisal to the others of the special-seven group. “Well, the world is a large city, and it has been getting its supply of peculiar water through pipes and conduits: and it has no idea of the location of the source that feeds those pipes and conduits.

“People, we must find this well of the world, this dire but necessary ocean of the Collective Unconscious. Various evidence shows that this pool does have physical existence and location, and yet we cannot find it anywhere on the Earth or under the Earth. We have to find it if we are going to revive it. Oh, it is an impediment not to be able to think clearly these last several days! How I miss my ideas! How I miss my old logical thought-train! How I miss my mind!”

“Mr. Dollo,” said a secretary-lady who came in (the building in which the special-seven group was meeting was the establishment of Sedgewick Dollo in his exile), “that Miss Phosphor McCabe has called again and says that she has friends who know where the well is and what to do about it.”

“Sedgewick,” Irene Komohana chided, “Miss Phosphor can’t be real! She has to be a tall story that you made up. Isn’t she the lady who lives in the pink pagoda? You made her up as a latter-day legend for your town here.”

“Wan-witted as I am, I’m not sure whether I made her up or not,” Sedgewick Dollo confessed. “Oh, wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to think straight again!”

“Miss Phosphor says that they have you where it’s short,” the secretary continued. “And she says that you will have to come up to their spring to drink.”

“The saying is ‘have to come down to my spring to drink,’” Edwin Senate said dubiously.

“Miss Phosphor inflected the ‘up.’” the secretary said.

“Tell Miss McCabe that we will see her and her friends,” Sedgewick Dollo pronounced sadly.

The friends of Miss Phosphor McCabe were plainly of a Fortean race, but they were not of the Stutzamutza subrace as Dollo had expected. There are, of course, many varieties of the Fortean people.

“We Forteans are not organized.” one of them said. “We would not be true Forteans if we were. And so we have no leaders nor spokesmen. But I

have a love of talking, and mostly they find it better to let me talk than to shut me up. I am Hiram Cloudhopper and I am moved to compassion to see that such arrogant and ignorant folks as yourselves are in trouble. You people are no more organized than we are, but you believe that you are. You accept so many things that stand in defiance of all reason that it seems you'd believe anything without question. So we will talk to you, since Miss McCabe says that several of you are good folks. And yet your credentials aren't much."

Norbert Hsu in private life was president of the World Federation of Scientists. Carlos Liosa was President of the United States. Agnes Belka was First Secretary of Greater Russia. Edwin Senate was Premier of United Africa. Joshua Santa Cruz was Pope of Rome. Irene Kornohana was High Stylist Emeritus of the Best Dressed Women of the World, as well as Prime Minister of Asia and Polynesia. Sedgewick Dollo was Emperor of Latin America in Esteemed Exile.

Their credentials weren't much? What do you call credentials where you come from?

"Ah, ladies and gentlemen (though neither term seems appropriate to you) of the sprawling and possibly imaginary realm of Fortestan," the great cosmologist Norbert Hsu was saying, "there is one question that we must put to you: can you put water back in the well?"

"There is always plenty of water in the well," Hiram Cloudhopper told them, "but it's a bit compartmentalized there and one compartment of it runs a little low just now. Your difficulty is that you've been too proud to dip out of the well with the dipper of the crooked handle. You do not even recognize the great dipper which, with its queer handle, will dip from the other side of any barrier. You have relegated the dipper to legend as The Great Horn Spoon, but you do not really know it. Your problem is over with now, though. There is plenty of water. Set aside your pride and drink."

"But the well's run dry!" Agnes wailed.

"Not really," Cloudhopper said. "Only one small compartment of it has run dry. And it has run dry only because, on some level or other, you showed yourselves too particular about what came into it to fill it up."

"But all those animals voiding into it -" Irene began to protest. "And it would have been still worse if we hadn't -"

"What animals?" Cloudhopper asked. "You don't know just how

raunchy some of the animals can be. You should see some of the animals in our part of the well.”

“This well of the unconscious, it does have a real location in physical space?” Hsu asked. “We haven’t been able to find it anywhere on Earth.”

“Oh, it isn’t exactly on Earth,” Clouthopper told them. “It’s up in the air about twenty-seven miles above the Earth. In the Fortean Universes, almost everything is twenty-seven miles above the Earth: the moon and the sun and the planets, and the stars and the farther stars.”

“How can a well or ocean be subterranean when it’s twenty-seven miles up in the air?” Carlos Llosa demanded.

“What’s wrong with that?” Clouthopper the Fortean asked. “There are plenty of subterranean caverns and caves and oceans twenty-seven miles up in the air. You just don’t know what the interior of the sky is like. And whoever told you that your own topography was the only one or the correct one?”

“Just what do you people want for reviving the well?” Llosa asked cautiously.

“Oh, nothing at all,” Clouthopper said. “We were going to fill your compartment up for you anyhow. We were just having a little fun by delaying it a couple of days. But you people began to suffer too much, so we will call off the fun.”

“When can we use the well again?” Llosa asked.

“Oh, within five minutes. We’ll just whistle up to the boys there to knock out a barrier or two and let your compartment fill up. You’ll have to get used to it though. It is stronger and tastier than any water that you’ve had before. It might be too strong for a few of you.”

So, within about five minutes’ time, this particular portion of the well of the Collective Unconscious filled up again. People could draw on it once more. The people quickly became creative again, enough so that they could maintain their roles in the world. The deprivation, the suffering, the starvation were mostly halted. The world did not quite fall apart, but it had been close.

People could think again and enjoy again. They had their ideas back, they had their old logical thought-trains back, they had their minds back. They could die creatively and spectacularly again, and they could jive stupendously, some of them, and originally.

So then it was all as it had been before the well ran dry?

No, it was not. It would never again be the same as it had been before. This was strange water coming out of the well now, and the thoughts and actions that it nourished were more extravagant than any heretofore known. There came a weirdness over the whole of regular humanity, and it would be permanent.

You know what rough and shouting people the Forteans had always been? You remember what rude strutters the Boschites were? You know the loud and glittering insanity of the Dalikites, and the perversity and perfidy of the Albionians? These shabby, crude, delirious dregs of humanity had always lived on rocks in the lower skies and in shanties on the outskirts of our own towns.

But now we all drank their water we thought their thoughts (thoughts? some of their ghoully notions were enough to rot the flesh off your bones), and now we became indistinguishable from them.

The stuff that now came out of that enlarged well of the Collective Unconscious was too strong for many persons. It proved too stark for the stylish Irene Komohana, for instance, and for a few million persons like her.

“Glug, gloug, glaaach!” she retched (she even retched with style, Irene did, and yet she had already begun to lose that style). “I can’t drink this stuff, I can’t dream this stuff, I can’t think this stuff or act it out. It’s wild, it’s vile, it has no style at all. I’d rather die!”

And Irene did die soon after this, of a blundering and noncreative accident. And the enlarged ambient got to her at the last and denied her the circumstance of even dying in style.

“Better die than ratify!” some of the militant and refusing people declared (sloganing had come onto evil days with the great thirst and the extinction of wit). “We will not partake!” And they didn’t. These several million persons, for a protest, died gallantly but clumsily.

That was the end of elitism and of real class on Earth. All the people drank out of the common pot thereafter, and all became common, and unhinged and undirected, and a little bit trashy. You think it was common before? Now it was really common! “Oh, if only I could have a mind of my own!” people sometimes lamented.

Footnote (aw, naw, not a footnote; it’s a twenty-seven-mile-up-in-the-air note): This trenchant and illuminating discovery and reconstruction in the archaeology of the mind was presented - as a convention - as a

future account, as something that was to happen in the year 1999 of the present era. Actually it happened in the year 1999 in an era that prevailed a long time ago, an earlier cyclical correspondence to our own era. It is the true account of how things became so raunchy down in the well of the world and how ourselves became so raunchy. We haven't any particular wells or fountains of our own. We draw it all from the same unsanitary and common pool.

And Some in Velvet Gowns

1.

To catch on Earth an al-i-en,  
Sift every sand and strain each ooze,  
And find him out in town or fen,  
Unless he isn't wearing shoes.

“Alien Identification Handbook Boogie” (third verse)

Have you noticed how brightly colored everything is lately? That big hearing room downtown hadn't had that much color in it since the cast of Brightskin was arrested and brought in for a denunciatory hearing. And one vivid patch in that glittering velvet color medley was the red-flushed face of the angry Judge Daniel Doomdaily.

He had six shackled and manacled prisoners in the dock (they were even chained together by iron collars), and they looked like a rowdy and defiant bunch. These six were Delphina Oakley, Bridget Upjones, Evangeline Guillford, Elmer Fairfoot, Rollo Marquette and Caleb Outback. They had been in town for less than ten days, but it seemed as if they had been there forever. They were an advance pilot group for that town, they said plainly.

And the judge had six attesting citizens there. These seemed both puzzled and entertained by the goings-on, and only a little bit contrite for failing in their plain civil vigilance. These six were Sam and Sara Joplin, Fulgence and Hazel Sorrel, Buck Bigchester and Thelma Brightbrass.

And the judge had two aides who were supposed to sustain his prosecutions. These were Madras O'Connell, a comely young woman, and Anthony Krebs, who was a plain-looking young man.

“What is the matter with you people that you couldn't tell what they were?” Judge Doorndaily boomed at the six attesting citizens. “But for the accidental discovery of their program, small thanks to you, they would have completed the pilot phase of their takeover arid transference. How



could you have been deceived by them? The more you look at them the phonier they get. Anthony Krebs and Madras O'Connell, please begin to phrase up the case against the perfidious aliens."

(The six manacled and shackled prisoners in the dock were the aliens.)

"Madras O'Connell, come to the vesting room at once!" the loudspeaker blared in the voice of Over-Judge Kenneth Rictiram, or anyhow one of the overjudges.

"Oh, damn, Kenneth, I'm in session!" Judge Doomdaily argued with the loudspeaker. "And Madras is a special-knowledge person for this session. Someone else will have to do what you want. I need her here." And the judge patted Madras with judicial friendliness.

"Madras O'Connell, come to the vesting room at once," the loudspeaker overruled by its great volume. "Be quiet, Doomdaily. I outrank you and I wouldn't want it any other way. Get that girl in here."

But Madras O'Connell had already disappeared out of the hearing room.

"Sam Joplin!" Judge Doomdaily snorted. "You should be the most important and most knowledgeable man in your neighborhood, and you allowed yourself to be taken in by these six shoddy fakes who aren't even human. Look at the damnable aliens! They don't even have skin. I don't know what it is that they do have."

"We paint ourselves so you can't see," said Bridget Upjones, who was an alieness in the dock. "Maybe someday you get all the skin burned off of you and have to use cosmetics."

"They haven't skin, they haven't hair, they haven't human shape," the judge went on. "They haven't human smell or sound. All they have is gaudy clothes to cover their abomination. Why were you fooled into accepting these dangerous deceivers for human?"

"I don't know," Sam Joplin said. "They look like humans until you really look at them. And they're such nice folks!"

"Nice folks!" Doomdaily trumpeted. "Do the corruptions and destructions of the human elements of twelve cities in our part of the state look as if they were nice folks? It is only by accident that we learned they had taken over in these places. Madras, where is that report? Madras! Oh, she was called to the vesting room. To the vesting room? I don't even know what a vesting room is, but all at once I'm sure that we

don't have one here. Simple citizens, cast your eyes on these six aliens! They are an eroding and occupying disease."

"Only five of us aliens now," said Elmer Fairfoot, who was one of the damnable aliens in the dock.

"Five of you?" Judge Doomdaily shrieked. "One, two, three, four, five, six. I can count. There are six of you."

But the unnumbered aliens laughed.

"No, judge-man," said Rollo Marquette, who was another of the perfidious aliens. "There are only five of us here now. We have ourselves painted so it looks like there are six of us."

Madras O'Connell came down from the mysterious vesting room.

"You look different, Madras," Judge Doomdaily said, and he patted her with judicial restraint.

"I'm supposed to look just about the same, if you don't look too close," Madras said.

"Look at them! Look at them!" Doomdaily bellowed as he turned his attention back to the aliens.

All right, look at them. But the eye was caught by very many things before it really got to the aliens themselves. It was caught by their extravagant clothing. Well, there was a lot of bright clothing in those days, but not of such scorchy and flamboyant colors as the aliens wore. These were new and compensating and fulfilling colors. If one tried to see the clothing apart from the aliens who were in it, the colors were almost out of control. It was the aliens who tamed them by wearing them.

But all the aliens were dressed in this multicolored bright velvet, the men in doublets of old renaissance style, the ladies in gowns from the gownier days. These stranger folks were almost hypnotic in their getups, and the combinations of their bright garb and their dull selves did total out to approximate human shape and color.

But a closer look ("Oh, why do we never take that closer look till after the barn door is stolen!" Judge Doomdaily lamented) showed that the garments by themselves were impossibly unhuman, and that the persons of the aliens were even more unhuman in an opposite direction. Then why did these people, in combination with their contrived clothing and clinging ambients, look completely human? Well, they looked completely human until they were dissected by the analytical eye.

"Well, we have you in the dock now, and in chains," Doomdaily

gloated. "In chains? I never ordered any chains. We didn't have any chains. Where did they come from? We don't use chains anymore.

"And you, you reprehensible aliens, you would have corrupted and occupied the citizens of Center City as you have occupied those of Pondereek and Blackwell and Newkirk and Fairfax and Pawnee and Perry and Billings and Lucien and Redrock and Gray Horse and Pawhuska and Ponca City itself? Did you believe that our law enforcement was equally slack here? Oh, what has happened to my fine questioning mind? I still see things that cannot be, and I almost accept them. Where did these chains, manacles, shackles, iron collars, come from? How did they get into my hearing room?"

"Oh, take it easy, Red-face," said the alieness Delphina Oakley. "We're not wearing any of those things. Where is your humor? Do you think we're crazy enough to put on such heavy things? We've just got ourselves painted so it looks like we're wearing chains and shackles and manacles. This is just for fun. We thought your hearing room needed a little bit of it."

Delphina's voice, to an absolutely analytical ear, would have sounded horribly unhuman and made up of frightful and unarranged discords. But who can maintain an analytical ear all the time? To a sleepy and inattentive ear, Deiphina sounded delightfully young-woman human, with a lilt and a gaiety and a mocking.

"We owe so much to you, Thelma Brightbrass," Doomdaily said in a proud voice to that citizeness then. "Tell us how you discovered that your husband, Caleb Brightbrass, was taken over and replaced by the alien Caleb Outback. Madras, what have you done to yourself? I still say that you look different."

"You think the Madras-trick is easy to do?" that aide asked. "You try to do her sometime."

"My husband, Caleb Brightbrass, began to act a bit odd about the time that the new people moved into the neighborhood," Thelma was saying. "I didn't object to it. In every way except one he was a lot better than he had been. He was wittier for one thing. I should have been suspicious right there: my Caleb was always a rock-head. We mixed a lot with those new people and they seemed to be very nice folks, so that was all right. I knew that Caleb had become more like them than like the old folks, and that was all right too. I never had so much fun in my life, for about a

week. In every way except one, life was a lot better than it ever had been. But after about a week I said ‘Hey, wait a minute.’ to myself, and I got damned suspicious.

“And in a week they had their people-trap almost ready to trap the town,” Doomdaily orated. “Oh, how many towns have already become completely alien, and who can tell the difference? And then, Mrs. Brightbrass?”

“Then I said to Caleb, ‘Are you a man, or what are you anyhow?’ ‘Ah, I’m a nonfunctioning male,’” Caleb said. ‘I believe that’s the way you’d have to define me in your terms. Be patient with me for a little while. We often suffer these transition disabilities.’ That’s when I knew it wasn’t my Caleb. That’s when I knew that it was some other Caleb who had taken his place. Not that my Caleb didn’t have nonfunctioning spells now and then, but he never was smart enough to use words like nonfunctioning and transition.”

“Do you know how the alien came to use the name Caleb Outback instead of Caleb Brightbrass?” Doomdaily asked.

“Oh, Outback was my Caleb’s maiden name,” Thelma said. “He used it sometimes for fun. But I believe that it’s the aliens’ code that they can’t take over a person or a person’s name exactly. Well, that was when the scales fell from my eyes and I took a good look at Caleb and the rest of them. And when I saw what I saw, then I blew the whistle on them.”

“Elmer Fairfoot! Take your feet off that table!” Judge Doomdaily roared at the alien Elmer in the dock. “Even an alien can have manners. Do you think it’s civilized to have your shoes on the table?”

“I’m not wearing shoes,” the alien Elmer Fairfoot explained reasonably. “I just have my feet painted to look like it.”

“Anthony Krebs, come to the vesting room at once!” the loudspeaker blared in an over-judgely voice.

“Oh, lay off, Kenneth, I’m in session,” Doomdaily argued with the speaking apparatus.” You took Madras, and she seems to be changed since she got back. And Anthony is the only other aide I have. Besides, there isn’t any such thing as a vesting room.”

“Anthony Krebs, come to the vesting room at once!” the loudspeaker overruled Doomdaily. “Be quiet, Doomdaily. Send that young man in here right now’.”

But Anthony Krebs had already disappeared out of the hearing room.

2.

In Australia, the trees and other wild plants simply aren't related to the trees and plants of the northern hemisphere. None of the life there, either animal or vegetable, is related to life in other parts of the world. Close examination will reveal that the sets of things are utterly and outrageously different.

But a less close examination will not reveal this. A blended landscape of Australia cannot be distinguished from a blended landscape of the northern hemisphere in corresponding climate-zone and season. And this in spite of the fact that the southern grass is not grass, the bushes are not bushes, the sedges and reeds are not sedges and reeds, and the trees are not trees. Every smell and sound of an Australian landscape will be different from anything found anywhere else, but the totality and the effect of the smell and sound and sight will be the same as in a corresponding part of the world. A maddening identity of the big picture is arrived at without using any similar pieces. There's a weird compensation and balance and camouflage at work here.

- The Back Door of History,

Arpad Arutinov

Yowl, yowl, the dogs do howl, The aliens come to town...

- "Alien Identification Handbook Boogie"

(fifth verse)

"You six aliens can fool the careless eye and ear," Doordaily was saying, "but here in Center City we are people the closer examination. There is nothing about you that can escape us."

"We four aliens," said the alien Rollo Marquette. "There are only four of us here in the dock now, but we have painted ourselves to look like six of us. And do not look at us closely, Judge Careful-eyes, or you will find that you're looking in a mirror."

"Buck Bigchester," Doomdaily said to another of his good attesting citizens. "Recount for the record how you yourself became suspicious of this nefarious troupe of aliens. What did you first notice to be wrong about them?"

"I first noticed a bunch of things that were just all right about them," Buck said, "and most of them were about that girl Bridget Upjones there. I went for her the first time that I saw her. She had everything."

"Couldn't you tell that her texture was more vegetable than animal,

Buck? And that it was unsubstantial vegetable at that? Couldn't you tell that she had two sets of eyes, one above the other? Couldn't you tell that parts of the velvet gown she wore were still alive? Or that she smelled like impure ammonia?"

"Yeah, but she said that they had to use live paint for part of those color effects. And she said they had to use color because they just weren't there without all that color to complement them. And she put a little bit of that hot sauce stuff behind her ears, and it combined with the ammonia and came out smelling like 'Wonder Woman Number Nine.' Oh, I guess that I knew her teeth weren't like real teeth. And then she had those little fiddlefoot crabs that ran in and out of her ears. They made up for what was lacking in her ears, she said, and the total effect was human. None of that strange stuff could subtract from a girl as pretty as Bridget was.

"But I got a little bit suspicious the night I took her out to the Four-State Fair and we stopped in front of the weight-guesser with his scales. He would guess anybody's weight within three pounds or he would give them a three-pound box of candy. Now this weight-guesser was a real professional, and besides they have a lot of people around carnivals and fairs who aren't strictly human. He turned green when he saw Bridget, though, and he began to shake. 'Two pounds,' he said 'You weigh two pounds.' Bridget sat in that swinging seat that is part of the scales. And she didn't weigh anything, not anything at all.

"So I hit it within three pounds,' the weight-guesser said. "I win. Now you get out of here. You don't belong around here. You don't belong on this world at all.' 'Oh, no. I win,' Bridget told him. 'Two pounds is not within three pounds of nothing. Anything at all is an immeasurable distance from nothing at all. They're of different orders. Now you give me my box of candy!' She got it too. She scared him into giving to her. Those people like Bridget don't like to lose, not a bet, not a game, not anything."

Anthony Krebs came back into the hearing room.

"You look different, Anthony," Poomdaily said. "I don't know what it is, but you look just a little bit different. Well, is it my time? Is it time for me to go yet?"

"Don't rush it," said Elmer Fairfoot the alien. "In a moment, in a moment."

"Judge Daniel Doomdaily, come to the vesting room at once!" the

loudspeaker sounded in the voice of some overjudge.

“I don’t even know where the vesting room is,” Doomdaily started to protest. “Oh, it’s all right. I feel that I’m being guided there.” And the judge left the hearing room.

“Six little aliens,” the citizen Fulgence Sorrel razzed in a tired but amused voice. “Delphina Oakley, Bridget Upjones, Evangeline Guillford, Elmer Fairfoot, Rollo Marquette, Caleb Outback. Six of you in the dock. But are there only three of you now? And you are painted to make it look as if there were six of you?”

“Three of us here now,” said alien Elmer Fairfoot, “but try and count us.”

“And you’re not really shackled and chained,” Fulgence said. “They are only things you painted on for fun. And we can’t avoid being taken over by you?”

“Why should you want to avoid it?” Elmer asked. “Why do you object? These migrations are common. You’ve taken over yourself. That little deformity inside each of you, that person whom you sometimes call your subconscious, is what is left of a person who was supplanted by you. He is the one who, looking at it one way, had title to your body before you did.”

“I’m getting mighty hot about this.” the citizeness Thelma Brightbrass interrupted. “There’s a fishiness here that smells to heaven for vengeance.”

“But, Elmer, I have not personally supplanted anyone,” Fulgence said reasonably.

“No, but now all of those in your line of generation are born stratified. The supplanted ones. those who would have been born independently if it weren’t for the usurpation by you people, are now born with you and within you. In some places seven different strata have been counted. In this place, one more stratum will be counted very soon. Don’t fight it, Fulgence. It gives depth to us all, and we do need a place to stay.”

“Who will take me over?” Fulgence asked.

“There’s something the matter here and it gets matterer all the time!” citizeness Thelma exploded.

“I will take you over, Fulgence,” the alien Elmer Fairfoot said. “You are the closest thing to an intelligent one in your group, and I in mine. We will be in accord. And I’ll listen to you, down under there where you’ll be, quite often. Maybe as much as a half minute a day.”

“Thanks, Elmer,” Fulgence said. “Will I get a velvet gown?”

“No, only a torso paint-job for the present, but it’ll look like a velvet gown for a while. Later, but not much later, there will develop a synthesis of apparel to serve our common person.”

“Doesn’t your paint weigh anything?” Hazel Sorrel asked.

“Oh, yes, but we use just enough of it to bring us up to zero,” the alieness Delphina Oakley answered her.

“Well, what do you want here, Delphina?” Hazel asked her.

“Bodies.”

“Aren’t those bodies that you have there?”

“Not good ones. They haven’t any substance. We had to leave substance behind the way we traveled,” Delphina told them.

“I’m getting damned mad about this whole thing!” citizeness Thelma announced.

“How many of you are there, anyhow?” Hazel asked.

“Oh, there are just as many of us as we can scrounge up for,” Delphina explained. “If we can locate more bodies there will be more of us here to use them.”

Judge Daniel Doomdaily came back into the hearing room.

“Now we will quickly dispose of this case,” he said, and caressed Madras O’Connell with judicial authority.

“There’s something the matter with Madras,” Thelma railed, and there’s something the matter with Anthony Krebs, and now there’s something the matter with Judge Doomdaily. Look it Madras! Her clothes are different!”

“I’m not wearing clothes,” Madras said. “I just got myself to look like I am.”

“Maybe she’s a nonfunctioning female now,” Thelma challenged.

“Not now,” cried Madras, or whoever she was. “Oh, not now!”

“That nonfunctioning interval was a bit tiresome for many of us,” Judge Doomdaily said. People, he did look somehow different. He looked a lot different -

“But now we can function again,” said the judge, or whoever he was. “And now we will quickly dispose of this case, and of much else.”



## The Doggone Highly Scientific Door

A group of children swarmed down toward the new door. The door swung open. The music was booming and jangling in the park inside. and the children crowded through the door in a happy gang. Elroy Hunt went to follow them through, and the door clanged shut in his face. He felt it, he pushed it, and it wouldn't open. There were no knobs or handles anywhere on that door and it was closed solidly. This was one of the new doors at Whizzer's Amusement Park. Hunt stepped back from the door a ways. He was slightly puzzled. How do you go about working a door that is supposed to work by itself? He sat on a bench that was there just about three steps from that door in the wall of the park.

Elroy Hunt liked to tell people that he had never grown up. He was a circus flack and a carnival buff, a comic-book collector and a puppet-show puncher, a citizen of the summertime and a lover of amusement parks. He liked kid amusements.

He liked to eat kid food: Coney Islands, Ding Dongs, Chocolate Cones, Karmelkorn, frozen custards. corn dogs, Goffel-Waffles, Onion Kings, Fickle Pickles, Cracker Jack, Funny Honey, cotton candy, Hooper-Goobers, Cup-Pups, Eskimo-Toes, popcorn. And he had a kid's stomach to match his taste. Save for a few sudden, violent and short-lived stomachaches, he thrived on the junk.

There was another cloud of kids bearing down on the big door of the amusement park, about twenty of them in this bunch. ("I'd better tell them that there's something wrong with the door," Elroy said to himself. "No, I won't either, let them find it out for themselves.")

But the door swung open for the kids ("Hey. it does work," Elroy said. "It must have fixed itself. It must work on some kind of electric eye or scanner."), and the kids exploded through to the inside of the park. And Elroy Hunt followed closely behind them, so closely that he got a bloody nose when the door slammed shut in his face. Elroy went and sat down on the bench again. "There is a double Dutchman in that woodpile," he said.

With his love for such things, there had been no holding Elroy back when Whizzer's Amusement Park opened for the summer on May 24 of that year. It was a Friday, and the grade schools had just let out for the year. Elroy had built up eight hours of overtime that week so he took Friday off. Oh well, lots of young men get spring fever toward the end of

May every year, and they create excuses to take time off. Some of them go to ball games. Some of them go fishing, or they go tearing around in their cars out in the country. Some of them go to Grogley's Bar. Some of them might even go to Whizzer's Amusement Park. There is no accounting for a young man's fancy in late May.

But Elroy Hunt wasn't exactly a young man. He was forty-nine years old. Yes, and he had been forty-nine years old that year before, and the year before that too.

Another bunch of kids (Elroy knew this bunch) were coming to the big door, just five of them in this bunch, and a little bull terrier. Elroy Hunt fell in immediately behind them. The door swung open, and the kids went through. But the door banged shut again in the faces of Elroy and the little dog. The dog howled out loud, and Elroy did so interiorly.

"You go on home, King!" one of the kids called to the dog from inside the park. "They won't let dogs inside the park this year. Or stay with Mr. Hunt if you want to."

So the bull terrier named King decided to stay with Elroy Hunt and hook his fortunes to Elroy's. They had been acquaintances but not close friends. Now they looked at each other. They plotted a small plot together in a lightning meeting of minds. Both rushed at the door with absolute shouting-and-barking confidence that it would swing open for them if only they had faith. And both cracked themselves jarringly on the closed adamant door (it was really made out of wood and chrome and glass).

One little kid (hardly more than a toddler) approached the door, and it swung wide open. The little kid padded in, and Elroy and King (rushing for the momentary gap) hit the closing door so hard that they both bounced.

Frustrated, they both went over and sat on the bench that was only three long steps from the door. King licked his bruised foreshoulder. Elroy licked the heel of his hand that was bloodied and scraped.

A boy on a bicycle was coming at full speed (if the door didn't open for him it would be all-systems-smash), and the door opened and the boy was in. And the dog King (with the fastest four-footed takeoff in town) was right after that cycling kid. But the door (with the quickest swing-to of any door in town) whanged shut; and King was out (side and cold).

A man leading four ponies came to the door, and it opened with perfect courtesy, and the man and the ponies were in. And Elroy Hunt

was still outside when the door closed on him with abrupt rudeness.

Elroy sat on the bench again; and King (coming back to dog-consciousness after a while) lay on the grass. They watched a delivery truck go in, they watched a dude and his doll go in, they watched some schoolgirls wearing schoolgirl uniform skirts go in, they watched some mean kids from Berryhill go in; they watched a school bus from district seven, full of children, go in. They watched two mothers with three and a half children each go in, they watched a heavy truck with a load of watermelons and a Texas license plate go in, they watched the clown named Gumbo go in riding on the trick mule named Dumbo. Dumbo snickered at Elroy and King as he went in. He knew something that they didn't.

They tried it again. It still didn't work. The door would open for men and women and children and beasts, and trucks and buses and bicycles and watermelons. But it would not open for Elroy Hunt, and it would not open for the dog named King.

A cheerful man sauntered up.

"It's amazing, it's amazing," he said. "The doors, I mean. Have you noticed the door?"

"Oh, man, have I ever noticed the door!" Elroy Hunt said.

"They are highly scientific, the doors that they have this year," the man said. "They are highly selective. They will swing wide for all human people. That is their positive operation. They will open with a little insistence for almost anything else. That is their neutral operation. But there's another class of things (I never liked them, I'm glad that they barred them this year) that the doors reject completely. That is their negative operation. They are the newest and most scientific thing in doors. Get away from me, mutt!" The cheerful man said the latter words to King and not to Elroy Hunt.

"Do you have any idea how the doors work?" Elroy asked the man.

"Oh, yes," the man said. "I understand it. They are highly scientific. They work by scientific electricity and by up-to-date automation."

The cheerful man strode forcefully at the door, which opened just in the thin whisker of time for him. And Elroy and King -

"Naw, let it go. It's no use," said Elroy. He didn't try to follow.

"Grumpf," said King. He didn't try to follow either. They didn't even try it. They were tired of rebuffs. And the door closed very slowly after the

entrance of the cheerful man, as though daring them to make a rush for it.

King cocked his head at Elroy, and a bright idea passed between the two of them. There should be other door-gates into Whizzer's Amusement Park. There always had been. They went along Whizzer's Great Walls of China (they were made of pre-stressed adobe) that surrounded the park, and they came to the Marion Street entrance.

There were two dogs there, but no people to see their failure. Elroy and King tried it. The door wouldn't swing open for them: it wouldn't budge. They hammered on it with fists and they bit it with angry teeth. And it still wouldn't open.

There was happy shouting and chatter inside the park, and the loud squealing of the big wheels and rides. There were open-air hamburgers a-frying, and a wide-traveling garlic-and-mustard odor was shilling for them. There was the chanting and gabbing of barks and narks and marks. But they who had loved the parks couldn't get in.

Two little girls came running and the door opened for them. And closed again before Elroy Hunt and his doggy friends could get in. So they all went around to the New Haven Street entrance.

It was the same thing there. There were several bunches of farm kids going in there in pickup trucks. The door opened gladly for the farm kids and their trucks. It opened for all sorts of persons, young and old, and for about every kind of rolling and rambling thing there was. But it wouldn't open for Elroy Hunt. And it wouldn't open for the pariah dogs with him. Sometimes it seemed that there was no way that the door could let everybody else in and keep Elroy and his associates out without cutting someone in half. But it did it. People, that door was fast!

"I brought my students here just to study the highly scientific doors, said a snooty schoolteacher lady in pince-nez. "They let all people in whoever they are. They let most other things in. And they keep still another class of things out. And they never make a mistake."

"Ah, sometimes they may make a mistake," Elroy said. Elroy saw now that the lady wasn't wearing real pince-nez, but carnival gimcrack things instad, and a false nose with them. She took them off to scratch her real nose, and it was seen that she wasn't really snooty in either sense. She seemed rather nice.

"No, the doors never make a mistake," she said. "Highly scientific

things never make mistakes. I really believe that the doors are smarter than most people.” Ah, she didn’t really seem too nice after all.

“Yeah, they’re smarter than one people I know,” Elroy admitted bitterly. With his doggy friends, Elroy then went to the Oswego Street entrance, to the Pittsburgh Street entrance, to the Quebec Street entrance. At each place the doors refused to open for them: or, if already opened, they sure did close in quick and firm fashion.

The whipped man Elroy and the whipped dogs (there were six dogs in the party now) went back to the door of first encounter. They were a low-spirited bunch. Then their spirits got a quick lift from a bunch of high-spirited kids bursting out of the door. Elroy knew these kids, and one of them was named Curtis and was the owner of the dog King.

“Hey, King, I won you a dog bowl,” the boy Curtis shrilled “I won it throwing lopsided baseballs at wooden milk bottles. I sure am good at hitting those bottles.” He gave the fine bowl to King. The bowl had KING written on it in red letters, and King’s day was made, in spite of the humiliation of being excluded from the amusement park. And the boy Curtis had two other bowls that he had won. (This boy Curtis was the best grade-school pitcher in the city, and somebody at the ball throw booth was negligent in letting him take so many throws)

“I sure can hit with those lopsided baseballs,” Curtis said “You throw a sidearm spitball with the lop-side (that’s the heavy side) forward, and the weight wobbles but it stays forward. And it sure whams those wooden milk bottles. Hey there, aren’t you the Whitneys’ dog, Whitey? I got a ‘Whitey’ bowl here.” Curtis gave the bowl to the dog Whitey, and everyone was pleased by the aptness of the act.

“Hey, there’s Stubblefield’s dog, Spot!” one of other the boys cried his recognition. “Hey, Curt, that white-headed kid won the ‘Spot’ bowl. Hey, there he is now. See if you can trade him.”

“Hey, white-headed kid.” Curtis yelled. and he went and traded a “Fritz” bowl for a “Spot” bowl. He gave the bowl to the dog Spot.

“What other dogs?” he asked then, and he surveyed the bunch. “There’s Pepper and Fat Pat and Donnicker. I’ll go try to win bowls for them. I sure am good with those lopsided baseballs.”

The kids were back into the park through that free-swinging door; and Elroy Hunt, rushing giddily at the opening, was slapped silly by the nick-of-time closing of that door. That really finished Elroy.

In a hopeless mood, he rejoined the dogs. Three of them were happy with their bowls, and three of them were hopeful. But Elroy Hunt himself was frustrated and bitter. The old complaint "It shouldn't happen to a dog" seemed to take special and sinister significance in his mind.

"Ah, there's another old regular," a man coming out of the park said to Elroy. "I believe that you and I both make opening date at the amusement park every year. Have you been in yet?"

"No, I - I probably will go in after a while," Elroy said. "I was just sitting here on the bench watching the people, and the dogs."

"It's too bad the dogs aren't allowed in the park this year," the man said. "But there's a new state law that bars dogs from amusement parks. Say, have you noticed the jazzy doors they have this year? Very scientific."

"Ah, yes, I have noticed the doors," Elroy said. That other elder lover of amusement parks went away then, and Elroy Hunt sat and wondered what was behind it all.

After a while the boy Curtis came out again with his friends and with two more dog bowls, a "Pepper" bowl and a "Pat" bowl.

"I knocked the bottles down for the 'Pepper' bowl," Curtis said, "and I whipped a little kid and took the 'Pat' bowl away from him. They didn't have a 'Fat Pat' bowl. A plain 'Pat' bowl will have to do, Fat Pat."

Curtis gave the two bowls to the two dogs, Pepper and Fat Pat.

"Hey, there's Hearn's dog, Donnicker," Curtis said then. "And they do have a 'Donnicker' bowl. I didn't think they'd have one with a dumb name like that, but they do. It wasn't out on prize row yet, but they'll put it out with the next bunch. Then I'll win it and bring it to you, Donnicker."

And Curtis and his friends went back inside. Five of the dogs admired their pretty white and empty bowls.

Well doggone, guys, I'll treat," Elroy said suddenly. He went across the street to the Whistle Stop grocery store. He bought a mastiff-size box of Wigby's Dog Chunks for a dollar and nineteen cents, tax included. He brought it back across the street and filled five dog bowls with it, and it wasn't even a quarter empty. There was a park department faucet there, and he added water to the chunks, and the dogs went about the happy business of eating them.

"Don't worry, Donnicker," Elroy said. "There's plenty left. And Curtis will win you a 'Donnicker' bowl and bring it out pretty soon. Then you can have your feast."

Bascomb Whizzer himself, the owner of the park, came out and sat with Elroy Hunt on the bench.

“Ah, it looks like a good season,” Whizzer said. “Everything is greatly improved, and our theme for this year is ‘Science of Today.’ How do you like the park this year?”

“I haven’t been in yet,” Elroy confessed. “I may just possibly go in later.”

“I thought you always came early and stayed late,” Whizzer said. “And the doors, the highly scientific doors, how do you like them?”

“I think they’re a fraud,” Elroy Hunt said.

“No. That’s impossible,” Whizzer said. “They are absolutely scientific in their selection. They let in all people of every sort. They let in most other things. And they keep out all dogs. That’s because of the new state law that we can’t have dogs in an amusement park. And the doors can’t be fooled, and they can’t make a mistake.”

“Everything can make mistakes,” Elroy maintained. “And if one door should make a mistake, suffer a malfunction of its mechanism, then all the doors would suffer the same malfunction, since, I presume, you have them all wired together in some manner.”

“Absolutely not,” Whizzer said. “The doors work independently of each other. A fault in one door, if it should happen once in a billion times maybe, would not have any effect on the working of the other doors at all. What one door says is right is right. And what all seven doors say is right has got to be right. There is just no way to argue with science when it is right. There isn’t a human in the world who can’t go through those doors. There isn’t a dog in the world who can.” And Whizzer himself went back inside his park with that cocksure walk of his. The door closed very slowly after him, and Elroy -

“I swear that damned door giggled at me!” he said furiously. And he was thoroughly miserable.

Curtis and the other boys came out again after a while, and Curtis had two dog bowls with him.

“Here’s yours, Donnicker,” he called, and Donnicker accepted it with glad yelps. And Elroy Hunt filled it with Wigby’s Dog Chunks and water. And Donnicker began to eat with the special joy that only Wigby’s can bestow.

“The other bowl has ‘Elroy’ on it,” Curtis said. “It’s the only other one

they would let me throw for. They said that I had to quit after that, that I had to be a ringer. Does anyone know a dog named Elroy?"

"No," said Mr. Hunt. "But my own name happens to be Elroy."

They whooped and laughed on that one.

"You, Mr. Hunt?" Curtis guffawed. "Well, do you want it?"

"Sure, why not?"

Curtis gave him the bowl. Then Curtis and his friends went on home, followed by most of the dogs with their bowls.

"That Mr. Hunt sure is a nice fellow," Curtis said as they went away. "He treated all the dogs to Wigby's Chunks, and he took the 'Elroy' bowl for a joke."

The dog Donnicker was still eating his chunks, and one other dog (a good judge of character and circumstance) waited slyly with his empty bowl. Elroy gave him some more chunks. Then he filled Donnicker's bowl again.

"They look good," Elroy Hunt said. "They sure do." He filled his own "Elroy" bowl with Wigby's Chunks and water. He didn't have any spoon or fork to eat them with, and his face wasn't built as well as the dogs' for eating directly out of the bowl. Nevertheless, he began to eat the chunks. And they were good.

Elroy calculated in his head: A mastiff-size box for a dollar and nineteen Cents. And look how many servings could be got out of it! It would do me for more than a week, probably a ~week and a half, I could eat for less than a dollar a week. That's something to think about. And they're good.

His face wasn't shaped right for eating out of a bowl, but it would become easier in time. And he could always use a spoon or a fork when he ate the chunks at home. But he probably wouldn't.

"This is all right, this is all right," he said. "I guess I'll just eat them out of the bowl forever." And he continued to eat the tasty dog chunks.



## MAGAZINE SECTION

### 1.

#### STRANGE INCIDENT AT HATBOX FIELD

Years ago (oh, from 1958 to 1962) Junior Giant Jet-Hoppers were used on short commercial flights out of small airports in the NE Oklahoma, NW Arkansas, SE Kansas, and SW Missouri areas. These smallest of jets would carry only thirty-two passengers. Well, on the routes they ran there were seldom more than twenty passengers: if there'd been smaller jets made they'd have been used.

The Junior Giants had size limitations in several places. They had the narrowest throats of any jets, entirely too narrow; and because of this the Junior Giants were often choked down by the birds they sucked in, especially ducks and geese.

At dusk of November 2, 1940, a Junior Giant took off a north-oriented runway from Hatbox Field of Muskogee, Oklahoma bound for Fayetteville, Arkansas, a flight of ninety-four miles. This was a little early in the year for geese to be flying south, and yet they had been heard the night before this.

It was for this reason that Flight Attendant Angela Rebhuhn brought her shotgun along with her on that flight. Just after takeoff, seeing a flying V of geese coming right at them, she opened the noseescape window (quite against regulations) and shot a blast at the V of geese to make it veer off. Then she readied herself for the second blast but she did not shoot it. She said later that she had the clear impression that the leading goose of the V was not a goose.

The Junior Giant sucked up the first five flyers of the V, then choked and died, banked over the Cookson Hills, and came back to Hat-Box Field at an easy glide and made an easy landing.

The night service crew (it consisted of a man and a boy) removed four geese (and one thing that was not a goose) from the gullet of the Junior Giant Jet-Hopper. The damage was declared to be minor, and the Jet-Hopper took off again after a total delay of only seven minutes.

The four geese that had been sucked into the narrow gullet of the jet and choked it down were now no more than four hot little blocks of

charcoal (damn, they stayed hot for a long time!), and the man and boy spread them out on the floor of the machine shed.

But the leader of the V, the thing that was not a goose, did not seem to be badly burned. It was a curious creature. Its wings were like bat wings, very long fingers with a leather-like webbing between them. The creature was slightly made, but it had a finger-wing span of at least five feet. Its head and face were not at all goose-like. They were a little like those of a coon, or a monkey, or a comically ugly little man. Then the funny face stretched itself, flexed its web-jointed fingers, opened its eyes, and it said "Hot and fast, there's just no thrill like it." and it winked at the man and the boy, and the man and the boy fell all over themselves getting out of that maintenance shed.

Then they heard the popping of stretched leathery-fingered wings as the thing that was not a goose took to the air and vanished.

Nobody except Angela Rebhuhn ever believed the man and the boy. The man got testy and would not answer questions about it unless you found him boozed up down on Callahan Street in Muskogee. The boy started out hitch-hiking the morning after the incident. He said that he was going back home (to Olathe, Kansas) to finish high school. He said that he had seen something that only a liar could believe.

But their unbelievably story survived.

Every two or three years after that, people (even newcomers to the neighborhood who could not have heard the story) would report seeing a V of geese going south in the evening sky with a lead flyer that wasn't a goose.

I found the boy in an art class in Olathe, Kansas. He drew for me a clear picture of what he had seen. I found Angela Rebhuhn and showed her the picture.

"That's him, that's him exactly," she said. "I've seen him twice since then. But he doesn't lead geese into the hot throat when I'm on a flight. He and I have come to an understanding, an understanding over about three hundred air yards. When I shoot my warning shotgun blast, he veers off with the V. He understands that my second shot will be more than a warning."

By John T. Woollybear in the Sunday Magazine Section of the Muskogee Messenger of quite a few years ago.

John T. Woollybear was a casual man with pale blue eyes. He was

flecked with large tan freckles, and each freckle had a slight blue ring around it as though it had been drawn by a cartoonist. He had three wives, one in Illinois, one in Nebraska, one in Texas. He was on tolerably good terms with all three of them. Well, he sent each of them a card on her birthday every year. But he never entered the three states where they lived because (tolerably good terms or not) they had legal writs out against him.

John Woollybear was a newspaper hobo. He could run a linotype machine and all those other machines around a newspaper. He was a fair reporter. He wrote unusual feature articles for the Sunday Magazine Sections of newspapers. He had sold at least one of them a week for about forty years and that was about two thousand of them. He had his own rules for writing these Magazine Section stories: "THEY MUST BE STRANGE, THEY MUST BE OUTRAGEOUS, THEY MUST BE GARISH, and they must be true." And he insisted on that lower-case truth in every one of them.

He seldom stayed with one newspaper for more than a month.

When he left a town he usually left about an hour before dawn, dragging a suitcase big enough for three men, picking a highway nexus on the edge of town to hitch a ride from.

## 2.

### **STRANGE HAPPENINGS AT BLACKBERRY PATCH, KANSAS**

Parallel to the Cross-Timbers there is a ridge known, but not known at all widely) as Big Wind Ridge which runs from the Texas gulf-shore through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and into Canada. It is the unofficial place where the Great Plains and the hilly woodlands begin, and one goes down from the plains to the hills. There is always a strong wind out of the west all along the ridge, and as a result of this there is much kite-flying by men and boys also all along the ridge. Big Wind Ridge is the best kite-flying place in the world, and the best kite-flying place along the whole Ridge is Blackberry Patch, Kansas, an unincorporated place in Doniphan County.

Blackberry Patch, Kansas is the only place in the world where boy-carrying kites and man-carrying kites are really common. The west wind at Blackberry Patch will sustain really large kites, some of which are equipped with seats or even dangling gondolas such as passenger balloons have. It is not uncommon for three to five persons to be airborne by a single kite; it isn't uncommon if they are Blackberry Patch people. But there is something unusual and even secret about the people of Blackberry Patch.

The Blackberry Patch from which the settlement got its name was originally a hundred miles across, back in the Indian days, and the very vines were thick. But now (for the last hundred years or so) the patch has been nibbled away by settlers and farmers. But the heart of the patch still remains thick and secret; and it is there that the Blackberry Patch people (They are now an ethnic mixture of Kaw Indians and settler-Germans) live and make blackberry jelly at the Jelly Factory to sell all over the United States, and make kites and Fat Air suits. Since there is no graveyard or burying place around Blackberry Patch itself, one has to believe that the people go to what they humorously call the Elephant Graveyard in the Sky, in kites and their Fat Air suits, when their days are finished.

Sure the Kaw Indians flew kites back in the Indian Days, beaver-skin kites strung of frames of tough and springy Osage Orange wood. For kite-ropes they used twisted huckleberry vines. They flew the kites more than

a mile high, and sometimes the kite-riders put on their Fat Air suits and jumped out of the high kites. They might drift as far as fifty miles, across the wide Missouri River and into the treacherous Missouri Territory. And their descendants, the Kaw-Germans, still do it.

Affected by the technology of the Settler-German element, the Fat Air suits are much better than they were in the Indian days. And so are the kites. Tough rubber-like polyethylene has taken the place of beaver skins for both the suits and the kites. The suits used to be blown up by mouth, and the air was stoppered inside the suits by big wooden corks. Now the suits have regular air-valves in them; and every suit-traveler carries a bicycle pump along with him when he goes drifting. A person encased in a Fat Air suit can walk along pretty well on the ground, or bounce along; and if he falls down, he can roll along and bounce up again. And in the air he can get along famously. Fat Suitors from Blackberry Patch, Kansas have floated across the Missouri River and clear across the state of Missouri and come down in Illinois. They carry dried blackberries with them to nibble on. And they wear advertisements on their Fat Air suits, and they always attract attention when they land. Often they are given rides back to Kansas by drivers for the Missouri Kansas Motor Freight Lines, as MK Freight Lines is one of the advertisements they most often wear on the backs of their suits.

There is another aspect of the Blackberry Patch kites and the Fat Air suitors that some people find hard to believe. It is the main secret thing about them. There being no burial grounds around Blackberry Patch itself, the Blackberry Patchers, when they find that their days have about run out on them, go by kite and suit to the secret place with the secret name: but the joking name for it is the Elephant Graveyard in the Sky. A person gets into his Fat Air suit and goes up about a mile high in a kite. He jumps out then, and he begins to glide. But he does not begin his gentle glide downward as usual. He glides upward across the Missouri River. He comes to the secret place that looks like a big cloud on the outside. But it is a special sort of cloud with its spherical silver lining on the inside. It is bigger on the inside than on the outside, and has running water and green pastures. And there he will be gathered to the bosom of his fathers (mothers too, maybe), and will find all the wonderful Blackberry Patch people who have ever passed over to their glory.

This last part may be inexact as nobody has ever entered the miscalled

Elephant Graveyard in the Sky and returned to give an accurate report of it.

And just where is this big secret cloud with the joking name?

It is exactly over downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and exactly two miles up.

By John T. Woollybear in the Sunday Magazine Section of the Kansas City Star.

That was the last thing that Woollybear ever had published in the Sunday Magazine Section of the Kansas City Star. The Monday morning after it appeared, Peter J. Oldpeter was fired as editor of the Magazine Section and was replaced by a younger and less genial person.

And the Magazine Sections themselves in many Sunday newspapers were now being replaced by other things such as a second or even third section on TV personalities or Rock-Sockers.

### 3.

## THE STRANGE CASE OF THE GOOD GIANT IN STONE COUNTY, MISSOURI

The only things known for sure about Saint Christopher are that he was a very good person and that he was a giant. Other things about him, such as whether he ever really lived at all, or whether he ever really died at all, are not known for sure.

Dating from the third century A.D., all around the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, there are at least a hundred giant statues in various states of decay. In many cases the local belief is that they are statues of Saint Christopher. Some of the statues are fallen and broken badly. Some of them have lost heads and arms. But there is one thing missing from even the best-preserved of them, and that is the face. There are no faces on any of them, even those where the rest of the head is preserved. On the best-preserved of these statues, there is clear evidence that the faces were broken off with hammers or axes. So at least as many of the statues are called locally 'The Giant Without a Face' as are called 'The Good Giant Saint Christopher'.

But what could have been so very wrong, or so very right, with the faces of the stone giants that people believed they had to break them off?

In Stone County, Missouri, in the United States of America, near the place called Talking Rocks, there lived until two years ago a man named Horace Goodjohn Christopher, a retiring sort of man who seemed to be liked and admired by everybody and everything except the coons and badgers and wolverines. These animals hated him, but dogs loved him, and people liked him.

Horace G. Christopher, a giant of a man, was generous. And he always seemed to have money to be generous with. Nobody knew where he got his money for he never worked for pay, and he said that he didn't know where it came from either. "I just reach into one of my pants, and the giant pockets in them were so deep that they never ran pockets and I find whatever I need," he said. The good giant had giant empty.

The good giant had never worked for pay, but he worked almost all the hours of almost all the days without pay, doing all sorts of things for people, especially for widows and orphans. He was a talented workman in

every art and craft you could think of.

Besides his great height, there were two things a little bit unusual about this Giant John. He was seventeen-hundred-and-fifty years old. And he was dog-faced. That's right, dog-faced. In hair and hide and snout and eyes and ears and smell he was dog-faced. And it seemed a little bit weird to hear a man's voice (a clear, strong, friendly voice) coming out of his dog-face.

The Friendly Giant had a mill and he ground grain for everybody who brought it. Like all millers, he took one tenth of the grain in fee for the grinding. And yet the nine-tenths of the grain that he returned ground and sacked to the customer was always of greater quantity and greater weight than had been the ten-tenths that the customer had originally brought to him. And he gave to the poor one-tenth amount of every grinding that he had kept from the customer.

The Giant had a hotel or roadside inn at the place called Talking Rocks in Stone County, Missouri. He was the patron of travelers, so he welcomed travelers of every sort at his hotel and offered the best bed-and-board anywhere. When travelers left him, they paid whatever they could afford. And they always found twice the amount of their payment back in their pockets after they were a mile or so down the road.

Everybody liked him except those animals, the coons, badgers, and wolverines, those animals that traditionally hate and fear dogs. Then there appeared a wolverine of genius in the neighborhood. In every species, whether wolverine or human or other, about one individual in five million will be an individual of genius. The gifted wolverine got about a hundred other wolverines to assemble. He had to be a genius because the slashing solitary wolverines are lone hunters who hate other wolverines only slightly less than they hate creatures of other species. But he assembled them.

The mob of savage wolverines ambushed the good giant Horace Goodjohn Christopher one night. They killed him, and they tore his hot flesh right off his bones and ate it completely.

Well, was the giant Horace Goodjohn Christopher the same person as the giant Saint Christopher of Chanaan? His age of seventeen-hundred-and-fifty years would fit just about right. And the mystery of the old faceless statues of Saint Christopher might have been that they were dog-faced statues, and persons might have felt that it was not fitting that a



saint should be represented as dog-faced even if it was accurate.

And two days after the death of Horace Goodjohn Christopher, there came further corroborations that he was indeed the same person as ancient Saint Christopher of Chanaan. A man came in a truck to the Talking Rocks site in Stone County.

“I travel for the Zolliger Church Goods Company,” he said. “If nobody objects, I will take the holy bones of Saint Christopher with me. It isn’t seemly that they should lie here in the dank ground and be gnawed on by every animal that comes along. How many thousand of holy relics will they make’. A thousand sizable places could be made from just one of those giant tibia bones.”

“How do you know that they are really the bones of Saint Christopher?” someone asked him.

“Gentlemen, relics authenticate themselves,” the church goods man said. “And two nights ago, when I was in a hotel in Jefferson City, I dreamed that the holy bones of the good giant Saint Christopher could be found in this exact spot. I came here and found it to be so.”

I myself visited this church goods man, saw the bones and the relics that he was making from them, and was convinced of their authenticity. He even offered me a job selling them. “You are a charming man,” he said, “and I believe that you could sell anything.” There would be an incredible manner of relics made from those bones, and one man could not sell them all. But so far I have not taken the job.

By John T. Woollybear in the Sunday Magazine Section of the Saint Louis Globe, not too many years ago.

“This is the last thing I can every buy from you, John,” the Magazine Section editor of the Globe told John Woollybear. “Were I not retiring at the end of this month I would not dare to buy and publish this. It’s outrageous, of course, it’s silly, it’s garish.”

“But a Magazine Section piece cannot be too garish!” John Woollybear protested. “Everybody knows that.”

“Maybe everybody knew it fifty years ago, John,” the editor said, “but it hasn’t been true for a long time. This is the most inept and outrageous thing that I have ever encountered. But it served my purpose. What better way to thumb my nose at the powers at this newspaper where I have spent so many happy years! What a flood of protests they’ll get when this silly thing appears!”

John T. Woollybear took his money and left the newspaper office with a touch of sorrow in his heart. Was it possible that the world was in the process of passing him by? Was flamboyance and garishness no longer wanted in the world? Could it be that even a true account like this one of the good giant at Talking Rocks was too garish and incredible to appear in a Sunday Magazine Section of a Newspaper?

Woollybear felt bewildered. And in his bewilderment he experienced a sudden loneliness for his three wives, the one in Illinois, the one in Nebraska, and the one in Texas.

#### 4.

### **STRANGE ACCOUNT OF THE PIKE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA CLONINGS**

In the hamlet of Greely Gulch in Pike County, Pennsylvania, there are authentic cases of cloning. In fact, cloning is the way of life there. In my forty years of checking out strange-but-true stories all over the country I have investigated more than one hundred accounts of cloning in various regions and found them all to be false. But now I am prepared to state that the clonings that emanate from Greely Gulch are authentic.

In another Pike County town of Lacka waxed there was the case of three different sets of triplets going to work in the mill. These nine persons (of the three different sets) were all good workmen and they received good paychecks. But one of the auditors at the mill smelled fraud.

The auditor followed the nine workmen when they had finished work one evening. The nine of them walked behind some ornamental bushes at the front of the mill. Then only three men came out from behind the bushes. And the other six were not behind the bushes. They were nowhere. The auditor followed the remaining three to their boarding house. The three went in, ate their supper, opened their six packs of beer and watched TV, then went to bed. Well, the auditor was an adept at looking into windows; that's how he knew just how they spent their evening.

And in the morning the auditor was watching again. He saw the three rise, dress, eat their breakfasts, and then come out of their boarding house. He followed the three of them to the mill. Near the entrance to the mill, the three ducked for a moment behind some ornamental bushes. Then the full nine of them came out from behind the bushes, went into the mill and went to work. It was sheer fraud. Three men were holding nine jobs and drawing nine paychecks.

The auditor followed the nine/three men every evening. And they ate their three suppers and went to their three beds. But on Friday evening, the three basic men went to the bus station instead of the boarding house. They got on a bus and went away on it. The auditor went to the ticket window.

“Where did those last three fellows buy tickets for?” he asked the ticket seller.

“To Greely Gulch,” the ticket seller said.

I found that in a dozen other towns in a sort of circle around Greely Gulch the same thing was happening. The community of Greely Gulch was guilty of fraud by means of cloning at the expense of all its neighboring towns.

Then I went to Greely Gulch myself, and I found-’~I have read enough,” the Editor of the Sunday Magazine Section

of the Scranton Scanner told John T. Woollybear. “It’s drivel, John. No more, John. You’re not the man you used to be, John.”

“But read on, Mr. Farmington. Read how I myself went to Greely Gulch and how I became sure that all the people of Greely Gulch could clone. Read how I myself —”

“No, John, no,” the Editor of the Magazine Section of the Scranton Scanner said. “No more ever.”

“What will I do now?” John T. Woollybear asked himself. “I have always been the best Sunday Magazine Section Feature Story Writer in the World, and I got to be the best by following the stage that a Sunday Magazine Section piece cannot be too garish. I’ll not admit that I am wrong about this, but I must admit that the world has gone wrong about it. I’ve failed to place the last twelve Sunday Magazine Section pieces I’ve written. And all of them were amazing and all of them were true.

“My STRANGE CASE OF THE UFO NESTS AT WILDCAT WYOMING was shuffled off as fiction. Fiction? I was there; I learned everything; I even soloed in one of the Wildcat Wyoming’s UFG’s.

“I know that the clonings of Greely Gulch were real because I myself-”But what’s the use of arguing? My life is a bust. I am separated from all three of my wives and I miss them all uncommonly. I miss the one in Illinois. I miss the one in Nebraska. I miss the one in Texas. I must find a way to make things up to all three of them, but it’s against the law to make things up with all three of them.

“It’s time I hit the road again.”

John T. Woollybear went to his own boardinghouse and pulled his big heavy suitcase out from under the bed. Now it seemed to be bigger and heavier than ever before. He knew he would not be able to go hitchhiking with it again. It was as if had become older and weaker in the four days

since he had come to town and gone to work for the Scranton Scanner.

“What makes the thing so heavy, anyhow?” he asked himself, and he opened up the suitcase. “Oh yes,” he said. He took a bulky Fat Air suit out of it. He took a bulky folded-up man-carrying kite out of it. And a bicycle pump. It was still a pretty heavy suitcase. What to do?

“I am, after all, a charming man,” he said. “At least three persons in this world have found me so. But how will my charm work now? I could go back to Blackberry Patch in Doniphan County, Kansas. I learned their tricks when I was there. I could get into my Fat Air suit, go up in my kite, and jump out. As I am getting to my last years, I would probably glide up instead of down. I could drift into that cloud that is jokingly called The Elephant Graveyard in the Sky. It is exactly over Downtown Kansas City, Missouri, two miles over it. And there I would be with all the Blackberry Patch people who have passed over to their glory. I would be with them, aye, but I’d be as dead as they all are. I’m not quite ready for that yet.

“Or I could go back to Missouri and go to work with that friend of mine with the Zolliger Church Goods Company. I have heard that he is badly in need of an assistant to sell Saint Christopher relics. That big skeleton broke up into so many thousand genuine relics that there will be good business in them for as long as one can see into the future. But I know that I’d have a dog-faced feeling if I went into that line of work.

“Or I could go back to Greely Gulch and check in at the Outworker Agency. Then I would go to one of the nearby towns and get three jobs and draw three pay checks. But great howling thunder! I don’t want three jobs. I don’t want hardly one.

“But what will I do? There must be something for me. I am, after all, a charming man.”

He went out of his boarding house and to the variety store.

“Let me see that small suitcase,” he said. “Fine, fine, it’s just what I want. Let me have three of them. No, no, what am I thinking about. Let me have just one of them.”

John Woolvbear took the small suitcase back to his boarding house and set it on the floor in his bedroom. Then the little suitcase seemed to become three little suitcases on the floor.

“I am a charming man,” John Woolvbear reassured himself again. “Three persons in this world have found me especially so. It maybe that I won’t have to work at all, not if I spread myself properly. And all three of

those special persons are well-fixed now, so I have heard.”

John T. Woollybear who had once been the King of the Sunday Magazine Section Fabricators began to fill the three little suitcases out of the one big suitcase. And, by leaving out the Fat Air suit and the folding man-carrying kite and the bicycle pump and a few other items, he made the transfer perfectly.

Just before dawn the next morning, three men took their places at a good hitch-hiking highway nexus just outside of Scranton, Pennsylvania... The three men looked somewhat alike. Each of them had pale blue eyes. Each of them was flecked with large tan freckles, and each of the freckles had a slight blue ring about it as if it had been drawn by a cartoonist.

The three suitcases of the three men were just alike, almost just alike. Each of the suitcases had a lettered sign on it.

The lettered sign on one of the suitcases read TO ILLINOIS.

The second one here the sign TO NEBRASKA.

And the third one had the sign TO TEXAS.

## GRAY GHOST: A REMINISCENCE

There are a lot of people who don't even remember the old Electric Park that was south of Tulsa, between the Peoria Road and the Arkansas River. It was the dog-racing track complete with electric rabbit.

The palmy days of Electric Park were 1920 to 1928. The grandstands seated eight thousand people until the northern half of the east-side grandstand collapsed in 1925. After that, the grandstands seated only six thousand people.

It was on Halloween night of 1924 that Anselm Sheen took four of us boys, his son Barnaby Sheen, and Hector O'Day, Grover Whelk and myself, all of us ten years old — and he took us out to Electric Park in his Overland touring car. Halloween night was always the last (and highest-stake) night of the dog-racing season.

“It's up to you boys,” Anselm Sheen said when we got there. “I'll buy each of you boys a ticket to the dog races, even though the tickets are forty cents each. Or, it being Halloween when the ghosts walk, you can go looking for thrills in the old Holy Ghost Burial Ground just a quarter mile south of here. I'm going to watch the races myself, but if I were twenty-five years younger I'd go to the burial grounds for my fun. Ah, I see that you're already starting south for them! Meet me here in an hour and a half. The races will be over by then, and your grisly fun should be over by then too. Be careful if you try the Devil's Handshake. About nine years ago the devil got a good hold on a little boy and pulled him all the way down to Hell.”

“We won't be taken in by that, Mr. Sheen,” Hector O'Day said. “We're too smart for that.”

“So was the little boy who got pulled all the way down to Hell nine years ago, Anselm Sheen said. “He was a really smart boy. He reminds me of you, Hector.”

It was all weed-covered hard sand there as we walked south just a little bit after sundown. And the area had a sad scattering of runt apple trees on whose branches no apple had ever grown. As though drawn by some big magnet, all four of us headed for Devil's Handshake Dune. We felt more than heard the giggling of several medium-sized boys coming from a ditch. We even recognized one of them by his giggle. And we heard from the very middle of Devil's Handshake Dune (which was a sinkhole

and not a dune at all) the horrified screaming of a little boy in death agony.

Now, the mechanism by which the Devil grabs a little boy by the hand and pulls him all the way down to Hell is this: Devil's Handshake Dune is only twenty feet from where the river-bank drops suddenly down to the verge of the river. The point of the drop is the face of a cliff about twelve feet high. Into the face of this cliff, boys have been digging tunnels and caves for years. And one of those tunnels, a meander of more than twenty feet through the sandy dark, reaches right to the middle of Devil's Handshake Dune. The Devil's Hole goes down to the tunnel at that point, just big enough hole for a little boy to put his arm down into Devil's Hole on a dark Halloween Night — it goes like this:

“If you're afraid to do it, then let's forget it. If you really believe the Devil will grab your hand and pull you all the way down to Hell, then run away from this place as fast as you can.” “I'm not afraid,” the smaller boy says, “I'm not afraid of anything. I know the Devil isn't waiting in that little hole to pull me down to Hell.” “Then reach your arm into that hole as far as you can reach it. And whatever you feel there, shake it's hand. That's the initiation to join our club. There isn't any other way to get into it.”

So the little boy who wasn't afraid of anything lay down on the sand and put his hand down that hole as far as he could reach it. And the Devil grabbed his hand and had pulled him part way to Hell already. The little boy's whole shoulder was in the hole now, and his face was in the sand and his mouth was full of sand, and he was screaming in mortal fear.

Hector o'Day went to the edge of the area, and then went down the cliff that dropped to river level.

“Dirty Dugan!” he hollered into the tunnel entrance. “Dirty Dugan, let go of the kid! Hey, Dirty, we came past two of the tunnels that had already caved in quite near here. And the sand here is squeaking and shifting as though your tunnel was going to have in too. Then you'd be trapped in there and you'd die in there.”

The Devil, or whatever was in the tunnel, gave a loud grunt. The little boy somehow got his hand loose from the Devil, or whatever it was. Then he got on his feet and ran as hard as he could, sobbing all the way, towards the lights and noise at Electric Park a quarter of a mile away. Electric Park would be a friendly haven to him.



Hector O'Day climbed up the river-bank cliff, and Dirty Dugan followed him up and stood there looking at us. "Where you guys going to now?" he asked us. Dirty Dugan, dripping sand, was a bigger boy, at least twelve years old. He had his nickname because he was dirty. He never wore shoes, and he was rough. But this was the third year he had taken the part of the "Devil in the Tunnel" and he was good in the role.

"We're going to Amos Centenary Black's cabin," Barnaby Sheen said. "It's hairy fun just to listen to his talk on Halloween night."

"Amos won't let me in his cabin because I'm too dirty," Dirty Dugan said, "but maybe he'll let me stand in the doorway and listen."

But none of went into Amos Centenary Black's cabin that night, because Amos had just come out of the cabin door and locked it behind him as we got there. He carried a burning railroad lantern and a basket that seemed to have a jumble of things in it; and he started toward the "Monuments".

"Come along, boys, if you want to," he said. "I was just going to wake up Captain John Diehard as I do every Halloween night. He sure does get lonesome down in that grave. If I could only bear a human voice again,' he moans, 'or even a half-human voice.' Hey, I bet he'd even be glad to hear Dirty Dugan there."

"That's all stuff about you waking up Captain John Diehard on Halloween nights," Dirty Dugan said. "Why don't you do it with some witnesses present sometime?"

"Ah, but I will have five highly intelligent witnesses present this night," Old Amos said. "I'll have Hector, Barnaby, Grover, Laff, and you Dirty Dugan. If people will not believe you five, as Scripture says, neither will they believe one risen from the dead."

The crowd noise at Electric Park had increased to a happy roar.

"That will be the dog Tom Talley winning the first race," Old Amos said. Amos Centenary Black was part black-man and part Indian. He was also (we have his own word for this) one-sixteenth Corsican, and he was the great-great-grandson of the Emperor Napoleon the First Himself. Amos was caretaker of the old Holy Ghost Burial Grounds.

Captain John Diehard was buried in a substantial monument in this burial grounds, and these words were graven on the monument:

Captain John Diehard, born Jan. 1, 1800, died Dec. 31, 1899. He took his own death hard, and he said that he would be back.

“Captain John was old even when he was young,” Amos said. “He was sixty-one years old when he first became a soldier and a captain for the Confederacy.”

The monument rose only an inch above the ground, and an iron pipe came out only an inch above the monument. It had an iron cap on it. Old Amos turned a key in that cap, and then he screwed the cap off.

“Captain John Diehard!” old Amos called down into the pipe. “It’s Halloween Night, time for your yearly waking-up.” But there was no sound out of the pipe that went down into the grave.

“I have a Galton whistle with me, Amos,” Hector O’Day said. “Dogs and dead people can hear it, but live people can’t. Shall I blow it and try to wake him up?”

“Brandy is better,” old Amos said. From his basket he took a brandy snifter and a bottle of Royal Hanover Brandy, filled the one from the other, and let it down into the pipe in a little net. And then there was the sound of waking up in the grave below. A voice that sound like a squeaky gate was heard down in that hole. “There’s nothing like Hanover Brandy for waking the dead,” the voice wheezed. “Ah, this is the same stuff that took all the fur off the possum’s tail. But to the gist of the matter. Has the south riz again yet, Amos?”

“Not yet, Captain John, not yet,” Amos said, “but I have some good boys here who’d like to shake your dead-man hand.”

“Reach me your hands and voices then,” the rusty voice of the dead man said. “I’m avid for company. I always wake up lonesome.”

“I’m Hector,” said Hector O’Day putting his arm down the pipe, “and I’m pleased to meet you, Captain John. Ah, it’s like shaking hands with a pine board hull of splinters.”

“Aye, my bones do feel splintery, I suppose,” Captain John Diehard said from below, “but it’s a manly grip you have yourself.”

“You’re next, Barnaby,” old Amos said. “Then Laff and Grover and Dirty Dugan.”

“It’s a good grip you also have, Barnaby,” the dead man in the grave gave his praise. “If we’d had you at Sharpsburg, the South might not have lost. One man could have the difference it was that close.”

But I myself didn’t do very well at shaking hands with the dead man. I trembled, and I sure didn’t have a strong grip. The touch of his bare rat-gnawed bones almost made the hair rise off my head.

“There is something amiss here, Laff,” the wheezy, squeaky voice uttered. “I am a prophet as well as a captain of the Confederacy. And in my role as prophet I know that your father came from the north.”

“So did yours,” I said in a jittery voice, and I never did know who put such words in my mouth.

“It’s true, it’s true,” the rusty voice admitted. “My father was born in Pennypack, Pennsylvania in 1750, but he was still a suckling when he went south. But our cases are the same. You are no more under suspicion than I am, and I myself am above suspicion.”

Grover Whelk put his arm down the pipe.

“Yours is the hand of a surgeon,” said the rusty voice below. “And we’ll need good surgeons when the combat is joined again.”

And when the dead man shook the hand of Dirty Dugan he said, “‘Tis the hand of a seaman. Am I not right, lad?”

“Almost, Captain John, almost,” Dirty Dugan said. Well, Dirty Dugan lived on a houseboat. Yes, there were houseboats on the Arkansas River at Tulsa in 1924.

“Dirty Dugan,” the squeaky, dead-man voice went on, “rotten as you are, there will likely be a role for you to play. Did you know that I used to be called Dirty Diehard? When I went on decoy I’d go upwind of a company of Unionists, and they’d cry out: There they are! No, there! There must be a thousand of them from the smell of them! Let’s get them!’ Then they’d all come after me and my smell. And then is when my men would take them from behind of them and slaughter them. But to business! Amos Centenary Black, did you place bets for me at the dog track?”

“I sure did, Captain John,” old Amos said. “I bet six dogs to win: Tom Talley in the first, Muscadine in the second, My Gal Sal in the third, Mule Whiskey in the fourth, Gray Ghost in the fifth, and Calaboose in the sixth.”

“But Gray Ghost is here in the grave with me right now keeping me company,” the dead-man voice protested. “He’s a patronymic dog which means that he’s named after me his human father. I was called ‘The Gray Ghost’ in my combat days, when I wasn’t called ‘Dirty Diehard’. The dog Gray Ghost is here with me.”

“So he is, Captain John,” old Amos agreed, “but he will leave you when it is time for him to run in the fifth race. He will appear in the midst

of them then, the doors and windows being closed as it says in Scripture, in the ready room just behind the starting gates. He will appear there just when they are about to scratch him, and this will astonish most of the dog handlers. But not all of them, for several of them have already caught on that he is a ghost dog.”

“This is the fifth year that we’ll win big on the last night of the dig season,” the dead-man voice wheezed. “It should be a tidy sum that you have banked for me now, Amos. Enough to clothe and equip a company, maybe even a regiment.”

“It’s a tidy sum, yes, Captain John,” old Amos said.

“Listen, you five boys,” the dead man rambled on. “There is a lot you can do while waiting for the news that the South has riz again. You can provide yourselves with guns and ammunition. The fun to get is the Mannings 1855 Territory Rifle. 1855 was a good vintage year for both Mannings and Territory Rifles and for Royal Hanover Brandy. Just fill my brandy snifter for me one more time, Amos.”

“Maybe there aren’t any more Mannings 1855 Territory Rifles left, Captain John,” Barnaby Sheen voiced a doubt.

“There are as many left as there ever were, Barnaby,” the dead man argued, “since those premier rifles never wear out. More than three hundred of them were made, so more than three hundred of them still exist. As to gunpowder, use white powder only. Black powder will leave a smoke to give a way your position. Get your copper sleeves from Coopertown Coppersleeve Company; they’re the best. And pour your lead into molds made by Leadbelly’s Lead Mold Company Limited.

“Do not use straight lead. It lacks elegance. Let your shot mixture be ninety-five percent lead and five percent pewter. If you do not have pewter, use tin for the five percent in the mixture. Nothing else has quite the shine of a bullet made from this mix. It is the fact behind the legend of the silver bullet. But a silver bullet will not kill either ghost or devil, and this bullet will kill both. Amos, why don’t you give each of these fine boys a drink of graveyard cider. Then we’ll roll the bones a but before I return to my death for another year.”

“All right, Captain John,” old Amos said, and he pulled five paper picnic cups and a jug of graveyard cider out of his basket. He poured our cups full. “The graveyard apple trees never have any apples growing on their branches at all,” old Amos said. “The apples grown on the tree roots

underground. And they are the best cider apples in the world.”

Ah, they were. That graveyard cider was the best cider ever.

“Now we will roll the bones,” said the dead man in his grave. “They buried me without my dice but with my bowie knife. So after I’d been dead about fifteen years and time was hanging heavy on my hands, I whittled me a pair of dice out of my own ankle bones And they are the luckiest dice I ever had. Amos take that pair of dice out of your basket and I’ll play each of you in turn Prime Seven for a dollar First seven wins.”

Amos rolled his dice on the top of the monument by the light of his rail road lantern. “Four, is it not?” cried the dead man from his grave below. Well, if you’re dead and eyeless, you aren’t bound by the regular rules of line-of-sight. Anyhow, we saw that Amos had rolled a four.

“Now I roll,” the dead man said, and his ankle-bone dice made a nice rattle in his bony hand. “I have a seven,” the dead man said. “You owe me a dollar, Amos.”

The bunch of splintered bones that was the dead man’s hand rose out of the throat of the pipe. Old Amos put a dollar bill in the hand which closed over it and then withdrew back into the grave.

“You next, Hector,” said the dead man below us, and Hector o’Day roiled. “Snake eyes, is it not?” the dead man called it; and, yes, Hector had rolled a two. Then the ankle-bone dice rattled below. “Seven,” said the dead man, and his hand came up from the pipe, “you owe me a dollar.” Hector put a bill in the bony hand which withdrew down below again.

“You next, Barnaby,” wheezed the dead-man voice. Barnaby rolled the dice on the top of the monument by the light of the railroad lantern “Eleven,” came the rusty dead-man voice below, and it was indeed an eleven that Barnaby had rolled. “Now I roll,” said the dead man, and the ankle-bone dice rattled. “Seven,” said the dead man. “You owe me a dollar, Barnaby.”

“How do I know you rolled a seven?” Barnaby demanded.

“Oh, I’ll show you,” the dead man said, and his bony hand came up from the pipe with the dice in it. It was a seven the hard way, six and one Barnaby put the dollar in the hand beside the dice, and it all disappeared into the iron pipe.

“You next, Grover,” the dead man spoke, and Grover Whelk rolled the

dice by the light of the railroad lantern. That railroad lantern made all our faces look almost as bony as the dead man's hand. "You have beat me, Grover," the dead man said, "you have rolled a seven. Here is your dollar." Grover had rolled seven, yes, a five and a two. And the bone hand came up with a crumpled paper in it, which Grover took.

"That doesn't look like a greenback, Grover," Hector O'Day protested.

"It isn't," old Amos said. "It's a faded gray-back now, but in its youth it was a yellow-back, a golden-back. The colors of Confederate bills fade after a few years, especially in the stuffy atmosphere of the grave." It was a Confederate One Dollar Bill that Captain John Diehard had given to Grover Whelk.

"The dog Gray Ghost has left me now," the dead man spoke below them, "but he always was a come-and-go dog.! remember at the Battle of Pea Ridge, he would be with me, and then he would be gone; but as a ghost dog, he put the fear of Old Clotie into the Unionists. Yes, I guess it's time for him to run his race. You next, Laff."

I rolled a three. Dead man Captain John said that he had a seven. I put a dollar bill in his bony hand when it came up. I shivered when I touched its bones. I was never meant to play games with a dead man.

"You next, Dirty Dugan," the dead man said. Dirty Dugan rolled a six. "I have a seven," the dead man said. "You owe me a dollar, Dirty."

"I don't have a dollar," Dirty Dugan said sullenly.

"I knew you didn't, Dirty," the dead man said. "Houseboat kids never have any money. Now, instead of owing me a dollar, you owe me a trick. When you find Out what the trick is, in a week or a year or five years, it'll scare you liverless. But pay it you must."

"No, you won't scare me liverless, dead man," Dirty Dugan said. Dirty left us then and disappeared into the dark. But we heard him go into the river, and then we heard him swimming with strong but splashy strokes, home to the houseboat.

There was a great increase in the volume and delight of the noise at Electric Park, the dog track. "That was Gray Ghost winning the fifth race," old Amos said. "He's a favorite with the Tulsa dog track fans."

"There was a dog racing very early in the Old South," dead man Captain John spoke up informatively. "there was even an early mechanical rabbit. It was invented by Yves Denis Montalba in New Orleans in 1850. The rabbit ran on steam. It ran only once. It blew up and

killed eleven dog-racing patrons. But humanity builds on such mistakes and moves ever forward.”

“How do you pick dog-race winners for Captain Diehard, Amos?” Grover asked him. (Captain Diehard was snoozing loudly now.)

“Oh, I get the winners from him, though he is not conscious of the part that he plays,” Amos said. “He has mantic bones. Though he’s quite dead, except possibly on this one night of the year. I have but to stand on his monument here and call out to him below, and his bones will guide my hand in making the Xs opposite the names of the dogs that will win.”

“The way I envision things,” said dead man John Diehard, waking up (well, the return from the dead is a very spotty and broken thing), “is that about ten thousand of us great leaders of the Confederacy shall all rise from our graves at the same time. For best effects we should not be fleshed but should rise in our skeleton bones only; and yet we will be lively and completely competent skeletons. Coming so, we will send a wave of fear through all our enemies. On our rising we will raise our great voices like ten thousand powerful doomsday trumpets, and the entire South will rise with us.

“Our horses will likely rise out of the earth also, saddled and bridled and ready to ride, but the details of that are in the hands of the appropriate gods. My preference for my own horse (for I had eleven different horses during the various campaigns) is Roan Rex who was shot from under me at Vicksburg. No better horse ever lived. No better horse will ever rise out of the ground and live again.

“Well, that’s enough talk and stuff for one night. I’ll return to my death for another year.”

“Just a minute, Captain John Diehard,” Hector O’Day spoke sharply

“This already begins to seem like a dream. Could you give us some sign so we’ll know that it was real? A lightning bolt, maybe?”

“It would be better if I blew the Resurrection Reveille on my bugle. It’s the regular reveille with some exceptionally hot licks added. I notice though that wasps have made a nest in the mouthpiece of the horn. I’ll clear them out if I can, and you may be able to hear my bugle when you’re on your way. A lightning bolt I can do, yes. That should be good enough sign for the moment. And then good night to you until a year from tonight.”

Then there was a lightning flash you wouldn’t believe. The lights of

Electric Park shone black for a moment as though they were a negative of the lightning. The runt apple trees stood out like X-ray pictures of themselves in the lightning. The thunderclap was instantaneous and earth-shaking, and sudden rain could be heard in the distance. Then everything was wet - well, everything was wet except the dog Gray Ghost. He had appeared suddenly, with a winner's blue ribbon around his neck, and dry as a bone. He yipped a hello. Then he disappeared right down through the stone top of the monument and yipped another hello to dead man Captain John Diehard there below.

The four of us boys ran hard for Electric Park through the banging rain. Barnaby's father, Anselm Sheen, was trying to put the side curtains on his Overland touring car and it wasn't easy to do in the high wind that was blowing.

"What are mantic bones, papa?" Barnaby Sheen asked his father.

"I don't know, Barnaby," Anselm Sheen said. "We'll look it up in the dictionary when we get home." Anselm always made an effort to find answers to his son's questions.

He finally got the side-curtains on the car with our help, and we rode back into Tulsa. We were soaking wet but we sure did feel good. We sang one hundred rousing songs on our ride back to Tulsa (hey, we sure did sing good), we sang:

"We saw a man without a foot, and one without a head,  
And one without no legs at all, and all of them were dead."

"Did old Amos give you some of his graveyard cider?" Anselm Sheen asked. "Oh, did he!" Hector cried, "three big cups of it each." We sang:

"Jack of Diamonds, lack of Diamonds, your real name is mud! In your hand are four aces, all covered with blood."

Hey I didn't know we could sing like that. Whenever we missed a beat it was supplied by a dozen enraptured winged spirits outside of us. We sang:

"Oh give me a nickel, give me a dime.  
It does cost money to bury this body of mine."

"That graveyard cider was hard," Anselm Sheen said. "You've all got a snootful." We sang:

"Down with the dead men. Down with the dead men, Down with the dead men let him lie!"

We sang ninety-nine other songs on our ride back to town. We were



getting some amazingly hot licks in our singing, but we didn't know where we were getting them till we pulled up at the Sheen's and Anselm Sheen shutoff the motor of the car. Then we heard it, loud and total, the "Resurrection Reveille" with the hottest licks this side of Hell. We should never have doubted that dead man Captain Diehard would get off that bugle song for us. And we knew that he hadn't bothered to clean that wasp nest out of his bugle. He was blowing right through those angry wasps: they were the dozen enraptured (were they mad, boy') winged spirits. We heard that bugle from four miles away.

We had a lot of fun that Halloween night.

## LE HOT SPORT

The Dukkerin Daily was something of a fun newspaper for the four days of its publication. It seemed loaded with whetted axes ready to swing. It was witty and novel and titillating. "For the present, subscriptions will not be accepted," it announced, but it was everywhere on the newsstands. And every morning it had at least three "Jokes of the Day" that were better than the "Jokes of the Day" of any other morning paper anywhere. But the slippery heart of the paper was to be found in its "Predictions". That first day there was a whimsical story: "Two-dollar guitar launches local boy on thirty-nine-year stardom in musical world." But the boy's name, Randy Lautaris, was not known to the reading public. The interview with Randy had been done the day before, and nine-year-old Randy had indeed bought a guitar from a friend for two dollars. But the strings and frets and parts to put it into working condition would cost more than thirty dollars, and then it would still be an inferior guitar. Nevertheless, the Dukkerin Daily gave a lot of information of Randy's thirty- nine-year career which lay entirely in the future: the combos he would put together, the concerts in which he would star, the long list of songs he would write that would pass the ten million mark, the Cine-Melody Movies he would make. Randy Lautaris was a quick-witted and well-spoken nine-year-old boy, and likely he would have a successful career in something.

"Why only thirty-nine years stardom?" Randy had asked George Hegedusis who had interviewed him. "I'll be only forty-eight years old at the end of that stardom."

"I didn't say that it would end," Hegedusis told him. "It's simply that I can't see more than thirty-nine years into the future, nor can anybody else. If anybody else says that he can see further than that, he is a shameless confidence man."

George Hegedusis, appearing suddenly as a newspaper publisher, was the fairly rare combination of a passionate violinist and a shameless confidence man. He played the violin at baptisms and weddings and funerals, and also at award banquets. (Somebody better keep his eyes on that award every second or Hegedusis will have preempted it for himself.) And for some years before this he had been in show business. He called himself The Romany Houdini and he had some good escapist acts. And

he was a fine practitioner of the “Fallen Angel Act”. Now he was a little bit too old to be a show person, but one never gets too old to be a confidence man. But he had never dabbled in the newspaper business before, nor made predictions, nor done interviews.

“You are skating on mighty thin water, George the Fiddler,” Karl Staripen of the local police bunko squad told George that first morning when the Dukkerin Daily had been on the newsstands for less than nine minutes. If any new con popped up, Karl Staripen always knew about it within ten minutes.

“Prove malice on my part, or prove me wrong in any of my predictions or facts,” Hegedusis said, “or else do not interfere with me in my pure-hearted activities.”

(Karl had often arrested George, and yet they had remained tolerably good friends.) “What am I supposed to do, wait thirty-nine years to see if you’re right in your story about Randy Lautaris and his two-dollar buisted guitar?”

“You might as well, Karl. You won’t be doing anything else important for the next thirty-nine years, will you? But you can catch me up lots quicker if I’m wrong on the facts of other of my stories. Did you read my piece on Moxie Masterman?” That piece, also in the first morning’s run of the Dukkerin Daily, was headed “Moxie Masterman begins one-hundred-and-one game hitting streak” and the text ran:

“Moxie Masterman, hot-and-cold first baseman for the Louisville Lions in the new Deep South Major League, got his first hit of the young season yesterday, after twenty-nine times at bat without a hit. It was a pathetic, patsy eight-inning single that nobody could be very proud of. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of a hundred-and-one-game hitting streak, a world’s record to be set by Moxie. The streak will not be broken until August the third of this year when Moxie will once more go hitless after hitting in one hundred and one.”

“How do you like that story, Staripen?” Hegedusis asked the bunko cop. “Hang me on that one if Moxie misses today, or any day for a while now. But he won’t.”

“I remember Moxie when he was in the Texas League,” Karl said. “George, why is Moira in this room of yours? Does that mean my death, or yours?”

“Probably mine. I’ll be predicting my own death, tomorrow likely.”

Moira was a strange and beautiful lady. Sometimes people could see her and sometimes they couldn't. But she was always a bad omen.

"Four of the twelve stories in this first edition of your paper will give me a chance to nail you cold today or tomorrow or the next day, George," Karl Staripen said, "and I'm waiting to pounce on you. What's your object in all this."

"Unrequited genius demanding a voice, Karl. When you're better than anybody else at a thing, then there comes a time when you just have to go public." But George Hegedusis didn't slip that day, nor the next day, nor the next day after that. It wasn't till the fourth day that his newspaper publishing was brought to an end. And then he didn't slip, didn't make a false prediction. It was his totally hair-raising true prediction that caused the very stones to cry out "Enough!" against him.

2

This was the outrageous prediction: "Eleven-year-old Caspar Lampiste didn't seem very much worried when I told him that he had only one day to live, that he would be killed by an automobile then. 'What kind of automobile?' he laughed. 'Shouldn't I get to pick what kind of automobile I want to be killed with?' 'It will be a foreign car name Le Hot Sport,' you faithful reporter, I, George Hegedusis, told him. 'Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow!' young Caspar sang out. 'That's the rarest car there is. There are only four Le Hot Sports in the United States.' 'There will be five of them,' I said, 'and you will be killed by that fifth one.' It is rather sad, really, that a young boy should be killed like that, but I only see and report the pending happenings. I don't cause them to happen. Caspar Lampiste, an eleven-year-old boy of this city will be killed by a Le Hot Sport automobile about one o'clock this afternoon."

That couldn't be disregarded. Karl Staripen, a captain on the police bunco squad, took George Hegedusis, the new newspaper publisher, into custody quite early that morning. And he also called in Rich Frank Lampiste, an executive of great scope and power who was the father of young Caspar Lampiste. Then the three of them went out to the Lampiste mansion and headquarters and they were quickly surrounded by a swarm of young executives who were in the employ of Rich Frank Lampiste. After a while, young Caspar Lampiste was brought in and set in the midst of them where he could be watched every second. "This is my office and headquarters and also one of my fortresses," Executive Rich Frank

Lampiste said, “and it occupies the entire sixth and top floor of my mansion here. It is in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree circuit of wonderfully clear see-out glass which is also bullet-proof and shatterproof. We are high on a hilltop here, and no automobiles are ever allowed within a thousand yards of the mansion. I don’t like automobile fumes. I have a man in TV communications with us at each of the four Les Hots Sports in the United States; and with each of them is the owner of that particular automobile who swears that it will not be moved today. My young executives, of course, were already at work on this problem before Karl Staripen called me, but thanks anyhow, Karl. All the Les Hots Sports in the United States are at least thirteen hundred miles from here. I intend to prevent my son from being killed by any of those four automobiles at about one o’clock this afternoon. Where do you get your nonsensical predictions, Hegedusis? And where, if ever, did we meet before?”

“We’ve met. I played the violin at your wedding twelve years ago.”

“Did you ever play at any hangings, Hegedusis? I’m angry enough to have you hanged out of hand. And I’ve always liked that tune ‘The Gypsy Hangman’ when done by a lively violinist.”

“I did play ‘The Gypsy Hangman’ at your wedding, Rich Frank. And I’ve always been a lively violinist. And, oddly enough, I did play the violin at a hanging once, at the special request of the man being hanged. But my own death will be otherwise, not by hanging. You all are so entranced by the little story on page one of my paper this morning that you may have missed my prediction of my own death of page eight.”

“What is Moira doing here?” Rich Frank lampiste suddenly demanded ‘Chief of Security’ O’Brien, couldn’t you keep her out?”

“She is a ghost, Mr. Lampiste,” O’Brien said. “I can’t keep ghosts out.”

“I can,” Frank Lampiste said. “Fade out, Moira. Be you gone! You are a mistaken omen this time. My son will not die today.”

“I read your account of your own death, Hegedusis,” the bunko cop Karl Staripen said. “But it’s phony. No Romany, whatever else he can predict, can predict his own death. It’s his blind spot. There is something very ulterior about that item of yours.”

“It’s interesting though<sup>1</sup>” said Rich Frank Lampiste. “It goes, as I recall it, ‘George Hegedusis’ death will take place about ten minutes after one o’clock this afternoon. He will be flung to his death from a sixth-floor

window of Frank Lampiste's executive suite on the top of his mansion. If they claim it was a suicide, do not believe them. It is murder. If my body is not found, it only means that they have hidden my body. It will be murder, and it will cry to Heaven for vengeance. And if there should be a grotesque or incredulous aspect to it, then the Lightning that is the father of me, George Hegedusis, will come and take away all that is grotesque and incredulous, and I will have died clean.' George, George, is nothing but some of your bleak fun?"

"No, the fun has all gone out of my life since I have come under the compulsion of predicting true."

"Moirra is still in the room," the security chief O'Brien said.

"Not to me, she isn't, O'Brien," Frank Lampiste stated.

Suddenly the bunko cop Karl Staripen was all over George Hegedusis. He shackled his arms behind him, and he shackled his legs to the modernistic steel framework of the executive suite. "However you go out of here, it will not be by a window, George," Staripen said.

"Every Romany man comes sometimes in his life to his 'Days of Power'," Rich Frank Lampiste spoke as though he were lecturing. "Usually, for the good of the world, these days are as short as they are grotesque. Now you come to the end of your short and grotesque and ridiculous 'Days of Power', George Hegedusis."

"They must not be remembered as grotesque or ridiculous," Hegedusis protested in a thick voice. "My father the Thunder will save me from that."

"You told my son, Hegedusis, that there would be five and not four Les Hots Sports in the country. What is the fifth one? Is the fifth one in the country yet?" Frank Lampiste demanded of the shackled George Hegedusis. "I don't know. It's probably crossing the border just about now."

"How?"

"Oh, by air, in a powerful but unregistered craft. it's Le Hot Sport that was stolen in Morocco last week."

"Yes, that's the one that has me worried. You really are onto something. The odds are towering against us being in any flightway of that powerful but unregistered craft. The odds are prohibitive against the automobile somehow falling out of that craft. And it's very long adds against that automobile falling through the very strong steel roof here

and killing my son.”

“Yes, the latter odds are prohibitive, Rich Frank Lampiste,” Hegedusis agreed. “There is no way that the automobile could fall through this roof here and kill your son in this place. Because your son is not here. Do you believe that fate is an imbecile? This is not your son, not the boy I talked to yesterday. This is a look-alike. Are you trying to trick Cod, Lampiste?”

“No, I’m trying to trick an lesser and meaner demiurge who plays such bloody tricks on poor humans. Maybe you’ve spoiled it now Maybe he’s heard you. No, my son couldn’t have remained silent all this while. But this nephew of mine here usually says something when he talks, and my son doesn’t.”

“How far is you son removed from here, Lampiste?” Hegedusis asked. “I’ll not tell you that. Certainly I’ll not tell it out loud. But he is in a fortress of none that is stronger and more secret than this one, an underground bunker, not so very distant from here. Oh, God, help me now. Myself am having a ‘far-seeing’! My son has left the fortress where I had him placed. He has started back this way, furtively and through the swamp-jungle. Why did he not stay where I had him placed? Henry, Henry, can you hear me? How did it happen?”

“He said he wanted to check the override lock on this underground bunker himself, Mr. Lampiste. And then he was out of that door and into the swamp-jungle which you yourself had constructed to be impassable. He was like a fox with his tail on fire. We cannot spot him yet, but we can hear his voice. He keeps crying, ‘I have to meet something. I have an encounter I must keep.’ But surely we’ll be able to seize him against shortly.”

“Surelv you’d better.”

“I believe that I’ll begin my own ‘Days of Power’ today,” said eleven-year-old Ronald Lampiste, the look-alike of his cousin Caspar Lampiste, “for I am a Romany man already. Oh, my Days of Power and Speed! ~ I work up early momentum, my days should go on almost forever. But I will need a spacious place to operate in. Where will I find it, where will I find it? Most Romany men do not come into their ‘Days of Power’ early enough.”

“I’ve always believed that three million dollars is too much money for a two-passenger sports car that doesn’t hold the road very well at over two hundred miles an hour,” said the bunko cop Karl Staripen. “And, to

me, it hasn't much style. There's a lot of ballyhoo has gone into that price. And yet the maker has sold twelve of the little buggers at three million each. He has to employ a lot of legend to do that, of course, and your item will help the legend, Hegedusis. It is said that eleven of the twelve Les Hot Sports have killed a person, and that twelfth one (the one that was stolen in Morocco last week, the one that may presently be airborne over our own country) is jealous of the others and is trying for a spectacular kill. It will bring as much as nine million dollars on the American market if it does attain a showy and spectacular kill."

"And it's said that each of the twelve is indwelt by an evil spirit," Rich Frank Lampiste mumbled. "That rumor has helped to get the base price up to three million dollars. Oh, the whole thing is shot through with such obvious fraud, and yet I tremble for the safety of my son. If my son's life is spared, I will give him any gift he wishes in the whole world."

"Would you give him a Le Hot Sport automobile, Uncle Frank?" the nephew in the room asked. "Then I bet he'd take me for a ride in it lots of times."

"Yes, Roland, I would give him, I will give him Le Hot Sport. And if he does not survive to receive the gift, then life is empty for me forever. Ah, we've made positive identification. The powerful but unregistered craft that left Morocco last night and left a jungle clearing in Yucatan two hours ago is indeed over our country now. And, unfortunately, we seem to be approximately on it flightway. Yes, yes, Henry, keep me posted, and see if you can't get it a little bit clearer on the screen. Oh, why doesn't it veer off a little bit? Karl, do you think that crazy George Hegedusis here really has something to do with this? And is there any way we could trade him in to fate to get a better bargain? How odd! All three of us here are Romanies."

"All four of us here are Romanies, Uncle Frank," said the nephew Roland Lampiste.

"It takes one to catch one," said the bunko cop Karl Staripen. "I always get he Gypsy cases, but I never was much good at solving them. Yes, I wish there were some way to trade in Fiddler George here for a better bargain. That's what your name, George Hegedusis, means: George Fiddler."

"I know it," said the fiddler man and fate-predictor. "And your name, Karl Staripen, means Karl Jailhouse."



“But my own name is somewhat more rare,” said Rich Frank Lampiste. “I doubt whether either of you know what my name Lampiste means?”

“Its common meaning is a sad-sack or a hard-luck Charley,” said George Hegedusis. “But its original meaning is ‘scapegoat’. Aye, you are one who must take on you the sins of a whole people.”

“Mine is a spooky name in the present context,” Rich Frank Lampiste said, “but my mansion here is built of steel. It is impervious. If I see that there will be a direct hit on us here, we can drop down to the floor below us, or to five floors below us, ii’ one second. Your estimate of the time is about right, Fiddling George. It will be just about one o’clock when the plane arrives, and we are approximately in its path.”

“Is your son also approximately in its path?” George asked. “Oh, my God, yes. I can see him in my scanner now. He’s climbed up out of the jungle-swamp and onto the road, and he’s running this way with his arms flung wide. I can even read his mouth. He keeps crying, ‘I have a joyous encounter that I must keep,’ and that encounter may be only minutes or seconds away. Oh, either shorten or lengthen the time, God.

“Oh, God, make time go away completely!” They had several clear views of the powerful but unregistered plane on their scopes. In particular they had a good view of the belly of it. And the belly was badly torn. The craft had made a rough belly landing in the jungle clearing in Yucatan (what illicit cargo had it delivered there?) and now it flew with landing gear permanently down and with an awful wobble. That plane was not in good health.

3

“Oh, my God!” Rich Frank Lampiste cried again. “The monitoring screen shows that the belly of the plane has burst open and the uncrated La Hot Sport automobile is falling out!” And so it was happening. But La Hot Sport, having a mind of its own, or possibly a mindful spirit in it, was into a high-speed glide. These cars always had the tendency to haze and float at above two hundred miles an hour, and they would actually become airborne at approximately three hundred miles an hour. It was thus that most of them had made their kills. The car had left the plane at about twenty thousand feet but it had inherited most of the plane’s speed. It circled in a wide, fast glide. “It is scanning and searching,” Frank Lampiste said. “It is looking for my son. Oh, it knows that I have switched

boys. Or does it? It is going to hit us dead, or it is going to fill our nostrils with its reek.”

“Hadn’t we better drop below?” the bunko cop Karl Staripen asked. “You go down if you wish, Karl. And unshackle George Hegedusis and take him with you. I will stay here.”

“And I will stay here,” said nephew Roland Lampiste. “And I will stay here,” said the shackled George Hegedusis. “Should I not watch the end of my own prediction?”

“I’ll stay too then,” Karl Staripen growled. Le Hot Sport came dead at them. Then it swerved past and filled their nostrils with its reek. It landed easily on the road three hundred yards beyond the mansion house, with hardly a jolt, and its speed had fallen below two hundred miles an hour. And the son Caspar Lampiste was seen on a scanning screen, running open-armed toward the insane car. The boy Caspar Lainpiste had lost his wits, or his wits were trammeled. Le Hot sport had braked and slowed, and it came to the encounter at no more than twenty-five miles an hour; and the boy, the Caspar-goat, was running open-armed toward it a tat least half that speed. The way he went down when he met the car, it was clear that the joyous boy was killed instantly.

“The debt, whatever it was, is paid. The sin, whatever it was, is subsumed. The impediment on the power of special men is removed!” the nephew Roland Lampiste was jabbering inconsequently. “Now our family name is no more ‘Lampiste’ or ‘scapegoat’. Our family name becomes ‘Langa’ or ‘flame’ now. I am Roland Langa now.” The nephew was very excited. “All right, Roland,” mumbled Rich Frank, who was crying. “I’ll have our names changed legally today. Yes, Henry, bring the body of my son here. Them have the mortician come for him in a quarter of an hour. Bring Le Hot Sport here also. I am impounding it. I will pay the list price of three million dollars to the Moroccan from whom it was stolen, but I will prevent by litigation its ever going back.”

“Will you give it to me, Uncle Frank, now that Caspar is dead?” the nephew Roland Langa asked. “Yes, Roland, I give it to you. You become my son now. You become a Romany man in his full powers.”

“But my name will be Robert Langa and not Roland Langa,” the boy said. “As Roland Lampiste I was included in the bloodlust of the car, but it won’t know that I am the same person with both of my names changed.”

“All right, Roland, Robert,” said his uncle, his new father, Rich Frank Langa. “George Hegedusis, why are you white and why are you trembling? Your prediction came true.”

“He is trembling because the Power has left him,” Roland-Robert taunted. “Four days isn’t very long to have the power, Fiddler George. and my own totemic name will be Le Hot Sport. And you are wrong in I intend to have it for more than forty years. I will drive Le Hot Sport, your own prediction, that of your own death, George Hegedusis.”

But the suddenly-much-older Rich Frank Lampiste-Langa was weeping as only a Gypsy man can weep. “Why do you still mourn, Rich Frank?” Karl Staripen asked. “You have your son again, reborn into the body of your nephew Roland.”

“Yes, I have him again, but for less than ten minutes.”

“Have you your Gypsy up, Rich Frank? Do you also predict?” Karl asked.

“Yes, also predict. And Moira is standing in the room with us again.”

“I am wrong in none of my predictions,” the trembling George Hegedusis the riddler jittered. “I am no longer shackled, men, though it appears that I am. But I was an escape artist when I was in show business.” Hegedusis stood up, free of his shackles. “I had to study a bit to see the hidden hinge on the encircling windows, but I knew there had to be a hinged section.” Suddenly the unshackled Hegedusis was across the big room. He swung out a narrow section of the encircling glass. He stepped out. And he fell six stories. “God receive his ghost,” Frank Lampiste-Langa spoke with emotion. “But at least we didn’t fling him out.”

“Yes, I hung him out, but not with hands,” Roland-Robert spoke in a sort of power rapture. “I killed him. He didn’t want to die but he foresaw it, and I compelled it. And I inherited his father the Thunder. And his losing the power killed him.”

“Maybe not,” said the old bunko cop Karl Staripen. “Hegedusis was possibly the finest practitioner in the world at the ‘Fallen Angel’ act. As an aerialist, he would miss his trapeze and fall eighty feet. And the horrified crowd would believe that he was dead. And then, after a powerful and dramatic interval, the ‘Fallen Angel’ would rise up from the sawdust and walk out painfully but triumphantly. He really knew how to fall. I think he remembered how to fall just now, either consciously or

subconsciously.”

“He looks dead enough,” Rich Frank Lampiste-Langa commented, looking down and still sobbing. “Fallen Angel, rise up again!” Roland-Robert Langa commanded in a loud and rough voice. “We are onto your tricks. Rise up, and slink away.” And George Hegedusis did rise up, slowly and torturously, like a zombie, from the flagstones below the encircling windows. He dragged himself a few feet, trembling and seething with black despondency. “What will happen to him now?” Frank Lampiste-Langa asked. “He can’t live with the shame of his lost power.”

“What will happen is what he predicted would happen,” jeered Roland-Robert. “His father the Thunder will come and kill him presently. And his family is already on the way here with propitiative music for his funeral.” Men brought the dead body of the boy Caspar Lampiste up into the big room then. And on his dead face was the look of radiant happiness. “You and I are cousins-closer-than-brothers,” Roland-Robert spoke softly to the dead boy. “We pledged that, whichever of us should die first, he would give one-seventh of his soul to the other one. You have kept your pledge, Caspar. You have yielded only six-sevenths of your soul to God. And you still have the seventh portion tight in your hands for me. Release from your hands to mine now.” And the dead boy, in some sort of post-mortem relaxation, did open his tightly clenched hands, and his brother-cousin did take something from them. Then the mien of dead Caspar Lampiste was completely peaceful. “And now, Fiddling George Hegedusis must not die in his miseries. He must die in his powers,” Roland-Robert-of-the-powers said. “His last prediction must come true. His father must take him out of his shame and unhappiness. His shame and unhappiness. But wait, wait, his father the Thunder is my father now too.”

“Do what you have to do, Roland-Robert,” the choked-up Frank Lampiste-Langa uttered, but his attention was on his dead son Caspar.

“Ostrafil, o two-tined lightning!” Roland-Robert called out loudly as he looked down on George Hegedusis collapsed against a nearby stone fence, perishing in his dejection. “Two-faced and double-dealing lightning, come and kill him. Come and get him, and he will play the fiddle tonight during the supper for all your high company in Nebos in Electric-Cloud Land. One thing he can do, lightning, is play the fiddle.” There was a small thunder out of the cloudless sky, but the two-faced,

two-pronged lightning did not strike yet.

“Oh go away, Moira!” Karl Staripen the bunko cop spoke sharply to the ghostly lady. “There is one death, and there may be another. But death does not happen in this room itself. You are wrong. Get out.”

“Let her alone,” weeping Frank Lampiste-Langa spoke hollowly.

“This is not an ordinary person who asks this,” Roland-Robert was railing up at the lightning-bolt that still withheld itself. “I am a Romany man who has entered into my powers at the present moment. I have subsumed one part of the soul of my dead brother-cousin here, and now I am an enchanted man. I own a Le Hot Sport automobile, and there are only twelve of those wonders in the world. I am Le Hot Sport in my totemic name, and there is only one of such wonders as myself in the world. My new family name is Langa or ‘flame’ and it is given to me to command. Come down, come down, Strafil the double lightning-thunder. Oh, surely there is a more spacious place where I can revel in my new power! Oh, I want to go in my power to that more spacious place right now’. Strike, two- faced Strafil, strike!” Then the double-pronged lightning-thunderbolt did come down. One Prong killed and crisped George Hegedusis as he slumped against the stone fence in his dejection. And the other prong came right into the room and killed the boy-man Robert-of-the-powers. He died with a cry of delight, and fell across his dead brother- cousin Caspar Lampiste. Robert Langa had found a more spacious place where he could revel in his sport-styled powers.

“It was quite a short ‘Days of Power’ that he had,” Karl Staripen the bunko cop spoke sadly in a voice that was always like gravel.

“Are you satisfied, pernicious Moira thou ghost?” Frank Lampiste-Langa asked tearfully. “I have seen you look several times before. You smile that treacherous smile, but you cry tears at the same time. Your tears should be analyzed. I will inter Le Hot Sport in the same crypt with my son Caspar and my nephew-son Roland-Robert. They can drive it forever in that More Spacious Place. Oh, it’ll roar and rev in there, and there will grow the legend of lively happenings in the crypt. What is that violin music drifting in through the swung-out window section, Staripen?” Frank Lampiste-Langa was red-eyed and he spoke with a curiously red and choking voice.

“It’s the family and mourners of dead George Hegedusis, come to take him away with weeping and violin-playing,” Karl said as he looked down.

“And the tune, it’s our oldest tune, the everlastingly happy tune that we play at birthings and weddings and funerals, all of them. It’s ‘The Gypsy Hangman’, Rich Frank.”

“Ah yes. It’s sad and happy at the same time. I remember now that George Hegedusis did play it at my wedding twelve years ago. Now they will play it for his funeral.” And Rich Frank smiled curiously and tapped the desk table before him to the music. No Gypsy, whatever his straits, can completely resist the happy lilt of “The Gypsy Hangman”.

Stories by RM Lafferty

THE SIX FINGERS OF TIME

ADAM HAD THREE BROTHERS

SNUFFLES

IN THE GARDEN

ALL THE PEOPLE

NAME OF THE SNAKE

THE WEIRDEST WORLD

ALOYS

THE UGLY SEA

RAINBIRD

DREAM

SODOM AND GOMORRAH, TEXAS

THE TRANSCENDENT TIGERS

MAD MAN

THE MAN WITH THE SPECKLED EYES

PIG IN A POKEY

SLOW TUESDAY NIGHT

GUESTING TIME

IN OUR BLOCK

HOG-BELLY HONEY

NINE HUNDRED GRANDMOTHERS

GOLDEN TRABANT

AMONG THE HAIRY EARTHMEN

NARROW YALLEY

PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI

POLITY AND CUSTOM OF THE CAMIROI

GINNY WRAPPED IN THE SUN

CAMELS AND DROMEDARIES, CLEM

THE ULTIMATE CREATURE

HOW THEY GAVE IT BACK

McGRUDER'S MARVELS

THIS GRAND CARCASS YET

MAYBE JONES AND THE CITY

ONE AT A TIME

CLIFFS THAT LAUGHED

CONFIGURATION OF THE NORTH SHORE

RIDE A TIN CAN  
CROCODILE  
ABOUT A SECRET CROCODILE  
THE CLIFF CLIMBERS  
CONDILLAC'S STATUE  
ENTIRE AND PERFECT CHRYSOLITE  
CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK  
OLD FOOT FORGOT  
ALL PIECES OF A RIVER SHORE  
FROG ON THE MOUNTAIN  
THE MAN UNDERNEATH  
INCASED IN ANCIENT RIND  
BOOMER FLATS  
WORLD ABOUNDING  
GROANING HINGES OF THE WORLD  
ISHMAEL INTO THE BARRENS  
NOR LIMESTONE ISLANDS  
SKY  
ONCE ON ARANEA  
EUREMA'S DAM  
DORG  
AND NOW WALK GENTLY THROUGH THE FIRE  
SEVEN STORY DREAM  
THE WORLD AS WILL AND WALLPAPER  
BY THE SEASHORE  
DAYS OF GRASS, DAYS OF STRAW  
MR. HAMADRYAD  
THE MAN WITH THE AURA  
AND NAME MY NAME  
ROYAL LICORICE  
THREE SHADOWS OF THE WOLF  
THE SKINNY PEOPLE OF LEPTOPHLEBO STREET  
OR LITTLE DUCKS EACH DAY  
THE HAND WITH ONE HUNDRED FINGERS  
OH TELL ME, WILL IT FREEZE TONIGHT  
FUNNYFINGERS  
CABRITO



HORNS ON THEIR HEADS  
BERRYHILL  
THOU WHITED WALL  
FALL OF PEBBLE-STONES  
QUIZ SHIP LOOSE  
BEQUEST OF WINGS  
BRIGHT COINS IN NEVER-ENDING STREAM  
SELENIUM GHOSTS OF THE EIGHTEEN SEVENTIES  
SPLINTERS  
LORD TORPEDO, LORD GYROSCOPE  
The Only Tune That He Could Play  
Well, What Was the Missing Element?  
YOU CAN'T GO BACK  
SQUARE AND ABOVE BOARD  
IFRIT  
GOLDEN GATE  
THIS BODING ITCH  
TONGUES OF THE MATAGORDA  
MAKE SURE THE EYES ARE BIG ENOUGH  
MARSILIA V  
ONE-EYED MOCKING-BIRD  
MAGAZINE SECTION  
GRAY GHOST: A REMINISCENCE  
LE HOT SPORT